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Thematic evaluation of the regional commissions

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) examined the relevance and effectiveness of the statistical work of the regional commissions in support of measuring the achievement and implementation of internationally agreed development goals. The evaluation was conducted using surveys, interviews, on-site visits, direct observation, case studies, document reviews and secondary data analysis.

The regional commissions provide a regional platform for sharing experiences and practices in statistics and are tasked with supporting the capacities of Member States to produce, use and disseminate statistics and to enhance the quality of statistics.

The regional commissions have effectively enhanced the capacities of Member States to produce high-quality statistics; however, fewer interventions have focused on strengthening the dissemination and use of statistics and the results of those interventions have been more mixed. The regional commissions have engaged with Member States to effectively facilitate dialogue, decision-making and consensus-building on the implementation of global and regional statistical norms and standards relating to the internationally agreed development goals.

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Overall, the regional commissions were largely responsive to the statistical support needs of Member States leading up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including support for reporting on the Millennium Development Goals. As the Sustainable Development Goals are implemented, demand for statistical support is expected to grow. While regional commissions have supported Member States thus far, they do not have sufficient capacity to meet the expected increase in demand for statistical support, especially in certain key areas that are less developed.

Notwithstanding some efficiency gains achieved through coordination and collaboration within and among the regional commissions, there is scope for further improvement in that regard.

To respond to these challenges, OIOS makes five main recommendations to the regional commissions, as follows:

- Enhance their support for the dissemination and use of statistics
- Increase their capacity to support key areas of statistics that are less developed
- Support the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into national statistical plans
- Further strengthen their internal collaboration
- Strengthen collaboration among the regional commissions

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I. Introduction and objective

1. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the need for a thematic evaluation of the regional commissions following individual evaluations of each of the five regional commissions and on the basis of a risk assessment undertaken to identify the thematic evaluation priorities of the Secretariat. The Committee for Programme and Coordination requested a thematic evaluation of the work of the regional commissions for consideration at its fifty-seventh session, to be held in June 2017 (see A/70/16). In its resolution 70/8, the General Assembly endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee on evaluation.

2. The mandate for the Office is set out in General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B, 54/244 and 59/272, as well as the Secretary-General's bulletin on the establishment of the Office (ST/SGB/273), which authorizes OIOS to initiate, carry out and report on any action that it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. The framework for OIOS evaluations is provided in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programming Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2016/6, regulation 7.1).

3. The overall objective of the thematic evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance and effectiveness of the statistical work carried out by the regional commissions in support of measuring the achievement and the implementation of internationally agreed development goals. The evaluation topic emerged from the scoping process described in the evaluation inception paper (see IED-16-012). The evaluation was conducted in conformity with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations system, established by the United Nations Evaluation Group.

4. Comments were sought from the regional commissions on the draft report and taken into account in the preparation of the final report. The formal responses from the regional commissions are included in the annex.

II. Background

History and mandate

5. Five regional commissions were created as subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council, as follows:

- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP): Economic and Social Council resolutions 37 (IV) and 414 (XIII)
- Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): Economic and Social Council resolution 36 (IV)
- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC): Economic and Social Council resolutions 106 (VI) and 1984/67
- Economic Commission for Africa (ECA): Economic and Social Council resolution 671 A (XXV) and resolutions 718 (XXVI), 726 (XXVII), 779 (XXIX), 809 (XXXI) and 844 (XXXIX) of the Conference of Ministers of ECA

- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA): Economic and Social Council resolutions 1818 (LV) and 1985/69

6. The overall mandate of the regional commissions is to foster comprehensive, equitable, integrated and sustainable development through effective economic and social cooperation in their respective regions. They assist Member States in addressing current policy weaknesses and enhancing their capacities to address development challenges and they use their convening power to provide a forum for Member States to discuss the economic, social and environmental development issues of their respective regions.

7. In support of their mandates, regional commissions undertake the following three cross-cutting functions:

(a) Knowledge and data generation, encompassing research and analysis, the generation and sharing of information and advocacy of policies;

(b) Consensus-building at the regional level, including through intergovernmental processes;

(c) Technical assistance, including advisory services and capacity-building in development sectors.

Governance and structure

8. Member States exercise corporate governance through their participation in the sessions of their respective regional commissions. The staff of regional commissions bring key issues to the attention of Member States to facilitate decision-making processes and support the implementation of decisions through the provision of secretariat services. Each regional commission holds an annual or biennial session, and its final decisions are reported to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council.

9. Each regional commission is led by an Executive Secretary at the Under-Secretary-General level, assisted by two Deputy Executive Secretaries (ECE is the exception, having only one Deputy). There are 45 subprogrammes and 53 divisions among the five commissions, with seven common thematic areas: environment and natural resources, economic development, regional cooperation, trade and integration, gender, population, and statistics.

Resources

10. The overall budgets of the regional commissions and the budgets of their statistics subprogrammes vary greatly, as illustrated in table 1.

Table 1
Budgets, overall and of the statistics subprogramme, by regional commission, 2014-2015

	ESCWA		*ECA*		*ECE*		*ECLAC*		*ESCAP*	
	Thousands of US dollars	*Number of posts*	*Thousands of US dollars*	*Number of posts*	*Thousands of US dollars*	*Number of posts*	*Thousands of US dollars*	*Number of posts*	*Thousands of US dollars*	*Number of posts*
Overall budget										
Regular budget	72 073	260	148 955	548	72 532	196	114 050	486	105 280	428
Extrabudgetary resources	12 120	–	72 159	226	34 613	29	25 000	42	30 245	115
Total	**84 194**	**260**	**221 115**	**774**	**107 145**	**225**	**139 050**	**530**	**135 526**	**543**
Budget of the statistics subprogramme										
Regular budget	4 201	16	9 136	38	9 284	27	5 579	26	5 018	23
Extrabudgetary resources	73	–	6 075	20	464	–	345	3	3 348	8
Total	**4 274**	**16**	**15 211**	**58**	**9 748**	**27**	**5 924**	**29**	**8 367**	**31**

Source: A/70/6 (Sects. 18-22).
Abbreviations: ECA, Economic Commission for Africa; ECE, Economic Commission for Europe; ECLAC, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; ESCAP, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; ESCWA, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

Statistical work programme

11. Statistics are critical to the research and analysis, consensus-building and technical cooperation work of the regional commissions. The regional commissions support and facilitate the work of their respective statistical bodies, which are the nexus between the Statistical Commission at the global level and the implementation at the national level of the norms endorsed by the Commission. In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the support provided by the regional commissions to assist Member States in adapting, implementing and measuring progress towards the implementation of national development plans is of particular significance as it influences the quality of statistics and methodologies used, as well as the use of new and innovative methodologies and sources of data, known as the transformative agenda for official statistics. The regional commissions carry out activities to strengthen the capacity of Member States to produce, use and disseminate official statistics and also provide a regional platform for sharing experiences and practices in statistics work.

III. Methodology

12. The evaluation focused on the statistical work of the regional commissions in support of 134 low-income, lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income countries in the five regions and sought to answer the following four questions:

(a) How effectively have the regional commissions strengthened the capacities of Member States to produce, disseminate and use statistics in support of

the implementation of internationally agreed development goals? Effectiveness was defined as having contributed to enhancing the statistical systems of Member States;

(b) How effectively has the statistical work of the regional commissions contributed to the measurement of progress towards achieving internationally agreed development goals in their respective regions? Effectiveness was defined as facilitating relevant discussions and decision-making by statistical bodies and supporting the monitoring of and reporting on internationally agreed development goals leading up to adoption of the 2030 Agenda;

(c) How effectively and efficiently have the regional commissions coordinated and integrated their statistical work across their sectoral areas? Effectiveness was defined as using statistics to strengthen the work of other substantive divisions within regional commissions, and efficiency was defined as having the necessary structures in place to facilitate interdivisional coordination around statistics;

(d) To what extent has the statistical work of the regional commissions been relevant to the needs and priorities of Member States, in particular with regard to preparedness in relation to the 2030 Agenda? Relevance was defined as responding to the needs of Member States.

13. The evaluation methodology included a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods and focused primarily on the past four years. All evaluation results were triangulated with multiple data sources. The data collection methods included:

(a) Missions to three regional commissions: ECLAC, ESCAP and ECE;

(b) Interviews: 73 semi-structured in-person and telephone interviews with staff of the regional commissions, United Nations partners, Governments and other stakeholders;

(c) Web-based surveys:

(i) A non-random sample of staff of the regional commissions;[1]

(ii) Representatives of the national statistical offices of all 134 countries included in the evaluation;[2]

(d) Document review: structured review of key documentation, including reports of the statistical bodies, project reports and national strategies for the development of statistics;

(e) Case studies: in-depth case studies of 14 countries, using data from interviews, surveys, document reviews and secondary data sources, and cross-country comparison of results and contributing factors;

[1] The staff survey was sent to a non-random sample of 233 staff in statistics divisions and other divisions who worked with statistics; 166 responded (71 per cent).

[2] Of the 134 national statistical offices that were sent the survey, 39 responded (29 per cent). Even though the response rate was limited, data was also gathered from a number of other sources, such as interviews, direct observation and thorough document reviews.

(f) Secondary data analysis: analyses of programme data, other evaluations, budget information and data from reports on the programme performance of regional commissions;

(g) Direct observation of one regional conference and one conference held at Headquarters on big data and the data revolution.

IV. Results

A. Regional commissions have effectively enhanced the capacities of Member States to produce statistics, but fewer interventions have focused on strengthening the dissemination and use of statistics in support of the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals and the results of those interventions have been mixed

Regional commissions have effectively enhanced the capacities of Member States to produce high-quality statistics

14. The regional commissions played a significant role in enhancing the capacities of Member States to improve the quality and production of statistics, in accordance with their mandate to support the implementation and monitoring of and reporting on internationally agreed development goals. Between 2012 and 2015, regional commissions carried out approximately 200 capacity-building and more than 500 demand-driven technical assistance activities to strengthen the statistical systems of Member States. In interviews, stakeholders and staff of the regional commissions identified capacity-building as one of the top three strengths of the statistical work of the regional commissions, along with their proximity to Member States and their technical expertise on statistics.

15. Feedback from Member States on the support provided by regional commissions to enhance the production of statistics has been positive. In interviews, representatives of 10 of the 14 national statistical offices included in the case studies stated that the statistical work of the regional commissions had contributed to strengthening their capacity to produce good-quality statistics for decision- and policymaking. A large majority of the national statistical offices surveyed (96 per cent) also gave positive ratings of the capacity-building and technical assistance on data production provided by the regional commissions, with nearly all noting that this support led to a strong improvement (63 per cent) or some improvement (33 per cent) in their production of statistics. The stakeholders who were interviewed stated that the regional commissions provided effective methodological and technical support, in particular regarding the collection and production of economic statistics and certain social and population statistics governed by well-established global standards. These include the System of National Accounts, the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, and the Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System.

16. On the basis of expertise cultivated in traditional statistical domains, regional commissions were also able to position themselves as standard-setters, developing methodological guidelines, manuals and best practices to support capacity-building

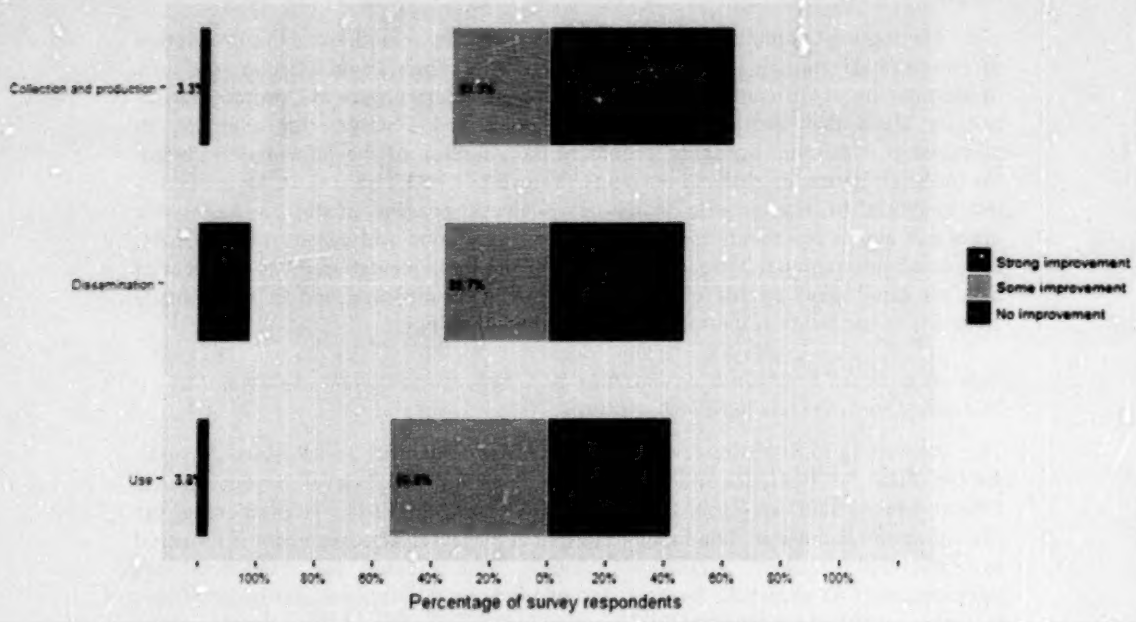
activities. All five regional commissions have issued publications in this connection. Examples include the ECE guidelines on harmonizing time-use surveys and guides on measuring global production and human capital, the ESCWA manual on estimating national transfer accounts and the ECLAC handbook on methodologies for price indices.

17. The regional commissions have also made efforts to modernize the production of traditional statistics. ECE established the High-Level Group for the Modernization of Official Statistics with many subsidiary groups and projects in key priority areas that include other regions. ECE and ESCWA, for example, in partnership with other agencies, promoted the adoption of the information system for the compilation of national accounts (known as "ERETES"). ESCAP promoted the adoption of the generic statistical business process model to harmonize processes across price indices. In the field of population and census data, ECLAC conducted interregional outreach activities for the implementation of its retrieval of data for small areas by microcomputer (REDATAM) software, and ECA has made advances in the fields of geospatial and mobile technologies.

Support provided by regional commissions to Member States on the dissemination and use of statistics has been less effective

18. According to Statistics for Transparency, Accountability and Results: A Busan Action Plan for Statistics, adopted at the Fourt5`3h High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2011, strengthening the dissemination and use of data in all areas and at all levels of government is essential to integrated national statistical systems and crucial for evidence-based policymaking. As shown in figure I, the majority of the national statistical offices that were surveyed reported that the regional commissions had helped them improve the dissemination and use of data (82 per cent and 96 per cent, respectively). Of those surveyed, 63 per cent rated the improvement in data production as "strong", compared with 46 per cent for dissemination and 42 per cent for use. The survey also revealed that 17 per cent of national statistical offices reported "no improvement" on data dissemination.

Figure I
Effectiveness of the assistance provided by the regional commissions on statistical production, dissemination and use
(Percentage)



Source: Survey of national statistical offices conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

19. With regard to strengthening the dissemination of statistics, only a few staff members from national statistical offices and regional commissions who were interviewed were able to provide concrete examples of such assistance; capacity-building and technical assistance activities in this area were not as widespread as those supporting data production. Examples of support for data dissemination included training conducted by ECLAC to strengthen the analysis and dissemination of population and development statistics; advisory services and workshops organized by ECE for the development of user-friendly websites in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, including the "Making Data Meaningful" series on the effective communication of official statistics; and the preparation of country profiles. The staff members of the regional commissions who were interviewed highlighted external factors that posed a challenge to the dissemination of statistics, including inadequate national infrastructure and technology limitations in some member countries.

20. In order to enhance the capacity of Member States to use statistics, all five regional commissions promoted national accounts as a foundation of economic policy. Examples of how regional commissions have strengthened the use of statistics include:

(a) Pilot implementation of subnational price indices in Egypt, the Sudan and the United Arab Emirates, providing policymakers with a tool for comparing well-being, poverty and related socioeconomic indicators, supported by ESCWA;

(b) Development of the Active Ageing Index to inform relevant subnational and national law-making, supported by ECE, in conjunction with the European Commission and the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research;

(c) Promotion of evidence-based policymaking in relation to gender equity, overcoming poverty and economic policies, and adjustment of the public servants' salary scale in the light of the updated consumer price index for the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, supported by ECLAC;

(d) Integration of gender statistics into the public finance policies of African ministries, on the basis of data from the African Gender and Development Index, supported by ECA;

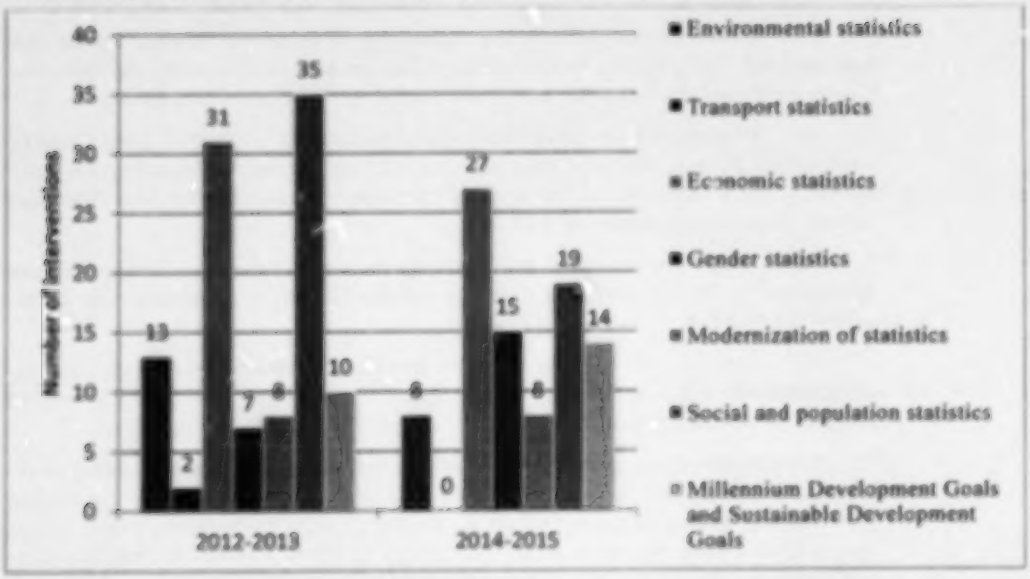
(e) Conduct of regional and subregional training workshops on the dissemination and use of population census data, supported by ESCAP, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund.

21. Some heads of national statistical offices who were interviewed pointed to the need for more support in enhancing the use of statistics. They said that the limited participation of key decision makers at statistical capacity-building events meant that statistics were not used to full advantage in decision-making; they therefore advocated a multi-stakeholder approach to capacity-building to foster the greater use of statistics.

Fewer interventions focused on follow-up to statistical assessments and on less developed areas of statistics in the support provided by regional commissions

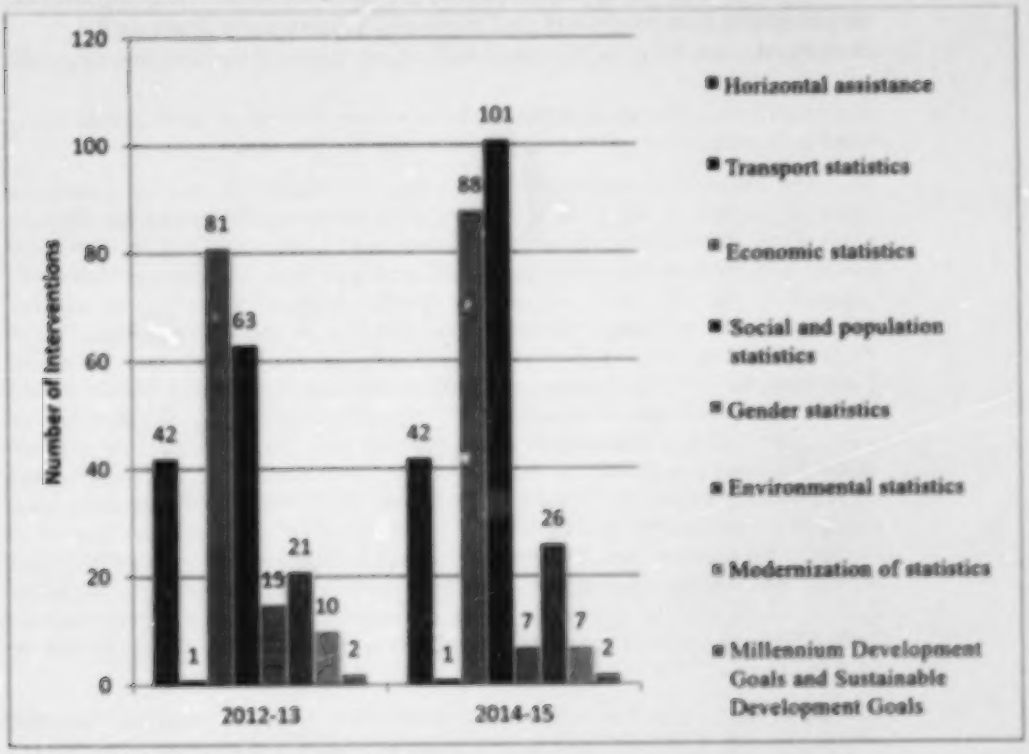
22. The regional commissions have focused fewer interventions on enhancing the capacities of Member States to produce statistics in less developed sectors, such as environmental and gender statistics. With regard to environmental statistics in particular, regional commissions have undertaken a range of thematic interventions relating to the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (ECE, ESCAP, ECLAC and ECA), emissions and waste-related statistics (ECE), the energy efficiency indicators database (ECLAC), water and energy statistics (ESCWA) and disaster risk reduction data (ECLAC, ECE and ESCAP). However, over the past two bienniums and in line with their mandate, regional commissions have provided more capacity-building and technical assistance on economic and social statistics than on environmental and gender statistics, which accounted for only 10 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively, of the overall statistical support provided (see figures II and III). This is worthy of note since environmental statistics are required for compiling indicators on nearly half of the Sustainable Development Goals. Figures II and III show that there is even less of an emphasis on support for the modernization of statistics.

Figure II
Focus of capacity-building provided by regional commissions, 2012-2015



Source: Data from the regional commissions and the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System.

Figure III
Focus of technical assistance provided by regional commissions, 2012-2015



Source: Data from the regional commissions and the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System.

23. The regional commissions have supported the overall statistical capacities of Member States by conducting and/or participating in assessments of their national statistical systems and national strategies for the development of statistics, although follow-up to recommendations emanating from those assessments has been limited. The integration of recommendations from global assessments and peer reviews into future national strategies for the development of statistics is key to maximizing the impact of such assessments; however, regional commissions did not consistently provide follow-up assistance to ensure that recommendations were implemented in order to strengthen statistical systems,[3] potentially hindering the long-term benefits of their interventions. Furthermore, fewer than one third of the national statistical offices that were surveyed reported receiving support from the regional commissions to develop or refine their national strategies for the development of statistics.

[3] ECE made some progress on monitoring the integration of recommendations from global assessments of national statistical systems, but follow-up has been limited because of funding restrictions.

B. Regional commissions have engaged with Member States to facilitate dialogue, decision-making and consensus-building on the implementation of global and regional statistical norms and standards relating to the internationally agreed development goals

Regional commissions have facilitated dialogue among Member States and decision-making on statistics in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals

24. The regional commissions have played a significant role in promoting technical dialogue on statistics in relation to the internationally agreed development goals. Through their support for and facilitation of meetings of regional statistical bodies, they have catalysed discussions and exchanges between Member States. The regional commissions have organized important regional gatherings to advance statistical work, including: the High-level Meeting on the improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, hosted by ESCAP in 2012 and 2014, respectively; the conferences of African ministers on civil registration and vital statistics, hosted by ECA in 2012 and 2015; the sessions of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, hosted by ECLAC in 2013 and 2015; the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for the Americas and the Conference of European Statisticians, which adopted a declaration on the role of national statistical offices in measuring and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals, hosted by ECE in 2015; and the first and second meetings of the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Africa, hosted by ECA in 2015 and 2016.

25. In bringing together technical representatives from the national statistical offices through high-level and expert group meetings, the regional commissions have enabled and promoted the sharing of experiences and practices relating to regional statistical needs and priorities and the provision of bilateral and multilateral statistical support. In the discussions, technical experts were guided and supported by the regional commissions on important topics. Overall, they have facilitated outcomes and agreements to advance regional statistical agendas on a wide range of topics, including:

(a) Civil registration and vital statistics;

(b) Poverty statistics;

(c) Modernization of statistical systems;

(d) Population statistics and the 2020 round of population and housing censuses;

(e) Environmental and agriculture statistics;

(f) Social and gender statistics;

(g) Geospatial information;

(h) Measurement of extreme events and disasters;

(i) Governance, peace and security statistics.

26. The regional commissions have also facilitated decision-making by the statistical bodies on the regional implementation of global statistical norms and standards, as well as the adoption of common methodological approaches to various thematic areas, thus ensuring regional compliance and follow-up to the implementation of internationally agreed development goals. A review of the reports of the last three sessions of the statistical body of each regional commission revealed that Member States have taken a number of decisions, including on: promoting the harmonization of economic, social, environmental, gender and poverty statistics; improving the quality of household surveys and census data; approving core sets of gender indicators; strengthening demographic statistics; and developing methodologies for agricultural statistics. These actions have brought a regional perspective to strengthening statistics.

Regional commissions have forged consensus on significant statistical issues, which has contributed to the strengthening of national statistical systems

27. The regional commissions have helped Member States reach consensus on agreements and resolutions that have improved the national statistical systems of their regional constituencies. In the last three sessions of the statistical bodies for each region, Member States came to a consensus on 833 action points, as shown in table 2. Specifically, they issued 225 recommendations, resolutions and/or decisions; noted 97 results; acknowledged 221 issues; and called for 109 actions by the secretariat and 181 actions by Member States. Examples of calls for action by Member States included requesting countries to generate synergies between the Statistical Conference of the Americas and other subsidiary bodies of ECLAC to strengthen statistical systems in the region (see LC/L.4154), and requesting African countries to allocate funds to support the implementation of the five-year regional project on national accounts (see E/ECA/STATCOM/3/21). An example of a call for action by the secretariat was the request to ECLAC to prepare a proposal for a regional statistical monitoring framework for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (see LC/L.4154). An example of a recommendation was that by the Statistical Committee of ESCWA on the importance of providing the resources necessary to national statistical offices to implement a post-2015 development agenda (see E/ESCWA/SD/2015/IG.1/7Report).

Table 2
Action points reflected in the reports of the statistical bodies of the regional commissions, 2012-2016

	Actions						
Regional commission	*Resolutions and decisions*	*Agreements and recommendations*	*Calls for action by the secretariat*	*Calls for action by Member States*	*Results and outcomes*	*Acknowledgment*	*Total*
ESCAP	26	6	2	6	21	–	61
ECLAC	2	66	13	60	45	113	299
ECE	–	40	15	34	20	76	185
ECA	–	61	39	60	11	32	203
ESCWA	–	24	40	21	–	–	85
Total	**28**	**197**	**109**	**181**	**97**	**221**	**833**

Source: Review of the reports of the statistical bodies of the regional commissions by the Office of Internal Oversight Services.
Abbreviations: ECA, Economic Commission for Africa; ECE, Economic Commission for Europe; ECLAC, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; ESCAP, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; ESCWA, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

28. Through the critical work of forging consensus on statistical concerns and providing solutions to improve the capacities of national statistical offices, regional commissions facilitated the adoption and endorsement of regional strategies and methodologies that helped regions and countries make progress towards internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals. Some examples of these are shown in table 3.

Table 3
Examples of key regional strategies and methodologies endorsed by the statistical bodies of the regional commissions, 2012-2015

ESCAP	The core set of population and social statistics and the strategy for improvement
	The modular and integration-focused approach to improving environmental statistics
	The core set of economic statistics and the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific
ECLAC	The development of the retrieval of data for small areas by microcomputer software (REDATAM 7)
	The provisions of the Santo Domingo Consensus on time-use surveys and the compilation of satellite accounts on unpaid work
	The strategy to improve agricultural and rural statistics
ECE	Recommendations on statistics relating to climate change
	The outcome of the in-depth review of leading, composite and sentiment indicators for official statistics

	The declaration on the role of national statistical offices in measuring and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals
ECA	The plan of the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa
	Regional action plan for Africa to improve agricultural and rural statistics
	The Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
ESCWA	Support for the improvement of national institutional frameworks for official statistics
	Building and managing statistical infrastructure, including metadata, registers, geographical information systems and population censuses
	Improved production of social statistics and adoption of new or revised statistical standards and foundational socioeconomic classifications

Source: Review of the reports of the statistical bodies of the regional commissions by the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

Abbreviations: ECA, Economic Commission for Africa; ECE, Economic Commission for Europe; ECLAC, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; ESCAP, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; ESCWA, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

C. Regional commissions were largely responsive to the statistical support needs of Member States leading up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Regional commissions supported reporting on the Millennium Development Goals

29. To support monitoring of and reporting on the Millennium Development Goals, the regional commissions provided technical advice to improve the quality and availability of data, enhanced the statistical capacities of Member States, exchanged good practices and provided a number of tools and guides. For example, they conducted workshops on data reconciliation; sponsored regional, subregional and national courses and seminars on monitoring the Millennium Development Goals; enhanced collaboration regarding the exchange of data within statistical systems; and supported expert group meetings on indicators. These activities contributed to an overall improvement in the availability and quality of the regional data on the Millennium Development Goals, as shown in table 4.

Table 4
Examples of improvements in regional data on the Millennium Development Goals

ESCWA	Overall improvement of 17 per cent from 2008 to 2014 in the average availability of indicators in the countries of the region
ECA	All African countries have at least 3 data points on 30 or more indicators
ESCAP	Improved knowledge base for decision makers in support of the achievement of the Goals

ECE	The Conference of European Statisticians endorsed methodological guidelines on measuring sustainable development and established a publicly available online database and guide to presenting metadata for the indicators of the Millennium Development Goals
ECLAC	26 countries in the region established indicators to follow up on the Millennium Development Goals

Source: Review of reports on programme performance by the Office of Internal Oversight Services.
Abbreviations: ECA, Economic Commission for Africa; ECE, Economic Commission for Europe; ECLAC, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; ESCAP, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; ESCWA, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

30. The regional commissions, in collaboration with other United Nations agencies and international organizations, led the coordination of the regional reports on the Millennium Development Goals, which provided important data on regional progress across thematic areas. However, gaps due to the lack of robust systems for monitoring and measuring the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals among Member States will also have implications for their reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Regional commissions have been largely responsive to the statistical support needs of Member States

31. In fulfilling their mandate to improve the quality of statistics and to strengthen the capacities of Member States to produce, disseminate and use reliable data to inform decision- and policymaking, regional commissions have largely responded to the needs of their member countries. Of the national statistical offices surveyed that expressed an opinion on the statistical work carried out by their respective regional commission to meet their country's statistical support needs and priorities, 57 per cent noted that that they were satisfied;[4] and, of the government officials from national statistical offices who were interviewed, more than 60 per cent noted that the statistical work of their respective regional commission was aligned with the needs of their Government. The officials said that regional commissions were responsive to requests for assistance and willing to explore options and to provide solutions to the challenges faced. A review of the five most recent reports of regional statistical bodies confirmed that the agenda and topics of discussions facilitated by regional commissions were guided by and responsive to the priorities and requests of Member States, as reflected in the approval of proposed agenda items and work programmes. Most staff of the regional commissions who were surveyed (89 per cent) stated that the statistical assistance delivered to Member States was in direct response to requests for assistance and the priorities they identified.

32. In preparation for the post-2015 development agenda, the regional commissions had promoted dialogue and decision-making and facilitated the adoption of regional positions that were subsequently presented and used by Member States in the negotiation process of the 2030 Agenda. Following the

[4] A quarter of the survey respondents expressed no opinion on this issue. A small minority were dissatisfied.

adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, the regional commissions were proactive in putting together comprehensive strategies, outlines and plans on how they would support Member States in respect of implementation, monitoring and reporting. In addition, the reports of the statistical bodies show that regional commissions led the way in developing robust statistical frameworks to support Member States in measuring and reporting on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, the regional commissions are addressing the transition from the regional reports on the Millennium Development Goals to the regional progress reports on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Regional commissions offer key comparative advantages in the statistical support they provide to Member States

33. The stakeholders who were surveyed and interviewed identified six key attributes of the regional commissions that added value to their work in statistics: their credibility and neutrality, in particular with regard to providing a regional platform for dialogue; their convening power and facilitation of regional consensus; their technical expertise in statistics; their support for the development of statistical standards and recommendations; their role as providers of capacity-building in various areas of statistics; and their proximity to Member States. They also agreed that these attributes must be fully utilized in order to support member countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

D. Demand for statistical support is expected to grow to meet the 2030 Agenda, but regional commissions will not be able to fully support Member States in this regard at current capacity

Demand for statistical assistance in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals is expected to increase

34. In moving forward with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, most national statistical offices that were surveyed (77 per cent) reported that the regional commissions would be the primary provider of statistical support with regard to monitoring and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and identified key areas where the regional commissions should provide significant support. These same areas were also identified in interviews with representatives of Member States. They include:

(a) Enhancing capacities to produce reliable, relevant and high-quality statistics;

(b) Improving infrastructure for producing statistics;

(c) Improving coordination between producers and users of statistics;

(d) Identifying statistical requirements or gaps in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;

(e) Exploring new sources of data, including big data;

(f) Securing adequate human and financial resources;

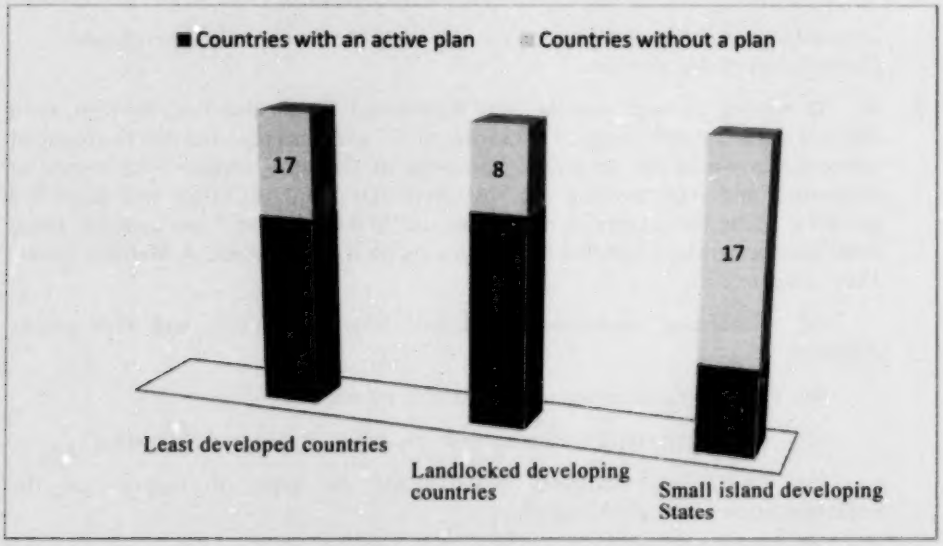
(g) Integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national development frameworks.

35. In General Assembly resolution 70/1, Member States agreed to intensify efforts to strengthen statistical capacities in developing countries and stressed the need for good-quality, accessible, timely and reliable data in order to measure progress, inform decision-making and ensure that no one is left behind (see General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 48). The representatives of national statistical offices who were interviewed stressed that enhancing their capacities to produce reliable and high-quality statistics and ensuring that efforts were focused on identifying priority requirements and support would be critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

36. The staff of the regional commissions and national statistical offices and other stakeholders agreed that requests for assistance are expected to increase with regard to improving all areas of the production, dissemination and use of statistics, in particular in view of targets 17.18 and 17.19 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which directly highlight the need to build capacity to increase the availability of high-quality and reliable data for monitoring and accountability purposes. Statistical capacities among Member States are varied, as illustrated in figure IV, which shows that 42 of 100 countries classified as least developed countries, landlocked developing States or small island developing States did not have an active national statistical plan in 2015.

Figure IV

Least developed countries, landlocked developing States and small island developing States with or without an active national statistical plan, 2015



Source: United Nations, "Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development". Available from: http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/goal-17/.

37. Even countries with active national statistical plans face gaps and challenges, including the need to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into national development plans, national statistical plans and national strategies for the development of statistics. While continued assistance will be required in all areas of statistical work, demand for assistance is expected to increase more markedly in the less developed areas of statistics relating to the environment and gender in view of the fact that more than half of the 230 indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals relate in some way to environmental statistics and the need for gender statistics is not limited to Goal 5 on gender equality. Nearly all of the representatives of national statistical offices who were interviewed recognized that these areas were either new or developing and thus required particular focus by the regional commissions.

Capacities of regional commissions are currently insufficient to meet increased demand for statistical support

38. The regional commissions do not have sufficient capacity to address the ever broader range of statistical needs emanating from the 2030 Agenda. The representatives of national statistical offices who were interviewed noted that responses to requests for assistance on key statistics were sometimes delayed because of insufficient capacity. Across all five regional commissions, the representatives of national statistical offices and the staff of the regional commissions who were interviewed reported that the major obstacle to providing effective and reliable support to Member States was insufficient capacity to address key statistical needs and the lack of resources to respond appropriately. Similarly, the national statistical offices that were surveyed identified insufficient inter-agency coordination (27 per cent) and limited resources (27 per cent) as the top challenges regional commissions would face in providing support to Member States in connection with the 2030 Agenda. In view of increasing demands on all thematic fronts, current resources are limited, despite repeated calls by statistical bodies to ensure that adequate resources are secured.[5] The regional commissions currently dedicate an average of 6.8 per cent of their total budgets to statistics subprogrammes. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs dedicates 21 per cent of its budget to statistics.[6]

39. The resources dedicated to key less developed statistical areas, while growing, were still limited. For example, ECLAC had recently appointed a P-4 officer responsible for environmental statistics and ESCAP had recruited a regional adviser on environmental statistics. ECE also had only one staff member dedicated to environmental statistics, while ECA and ESCWA had a staff member dedicated only partially to environmental statistics. In 2016, a Development Account project entitled "Programme for statistics and data" was approved to provide the regional commissions with temporary supplementary financial resources to provide statistical support for enhancing the capacities of Member States in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the funds are to be used on operational activities only, not on staff to manage the capacity-building.

40. In order to respond to growing needs with the 2030 Agenda, national statistical offices have called for more assistance in mapping their needs and capacities in

[5] Recent examples include calls by the statistical bodies of ECLAC, ECA and ESCWA.

[6] The statistics subprogramme of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has a budget of $34.85 million and comprises 122 posts.

relation to the Sustainable Development Goals; regional commissions have correspondingly realized that having a clear strategy to address those needs will be critical to support member countries more effectively. In that respect, some regional commissions have started a mapping exercise and are identifying strengths and good practices that can be promoted within and across regions: ECLAC has used a survey of Member States, while ESCAP and ECE have initiated intergovernmental consultations on regional road maps to develop statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals. The staff of the regional commissions who were interviewed suggested that a full mapping exercise could help all the regional commissions to assess emerging needs, adapt workplans and maximize their impact.

The potential role and impact of big data in the statistical work of the regional commissions is evolving

41. In the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, as endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 69/313, Member States noted the importance of drawing on new data sources to meet user needs, specifically tapping into data from civil society, academia and the private sector. In a context of increasing demands, limited capacities and resource shortages, the statistical system has been called upon to take decisive actions to transform how data and statistics are produced and disseminated to inform policy decisions. However, the representatives of national statistical offices who were interviewed noted that most national statistical systems do not yet have the capacities or tools to use big data, especially those in developing nations. The progress of the regional commissions in this respect was uneven. Some regional commissions, such as ECE, had organized forums and meetings on big data in the context of the modernization of statistics; the Statistical Commission for Africa had requested the secretariat to explore options on advancing the use of big data; and ECLAC had included this item in its budget. More recently, the regional commissions, in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, had organized regional discussions with national statistical offices, which had helped to highlight the potential benefits of big data. ECE and ESCAP are members of the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics, which explores potential benefits and challenges; however, the stakeholders who were interviewed noted that every region needed to move at its own pace and in full consultation with its constituency to maximize any potential benefits that big data might bring in the coming years. While discussions were continuing, the focus had switched to improving the integration of data from all sources: statistical, administrative, geospatial and new sources, including big data.

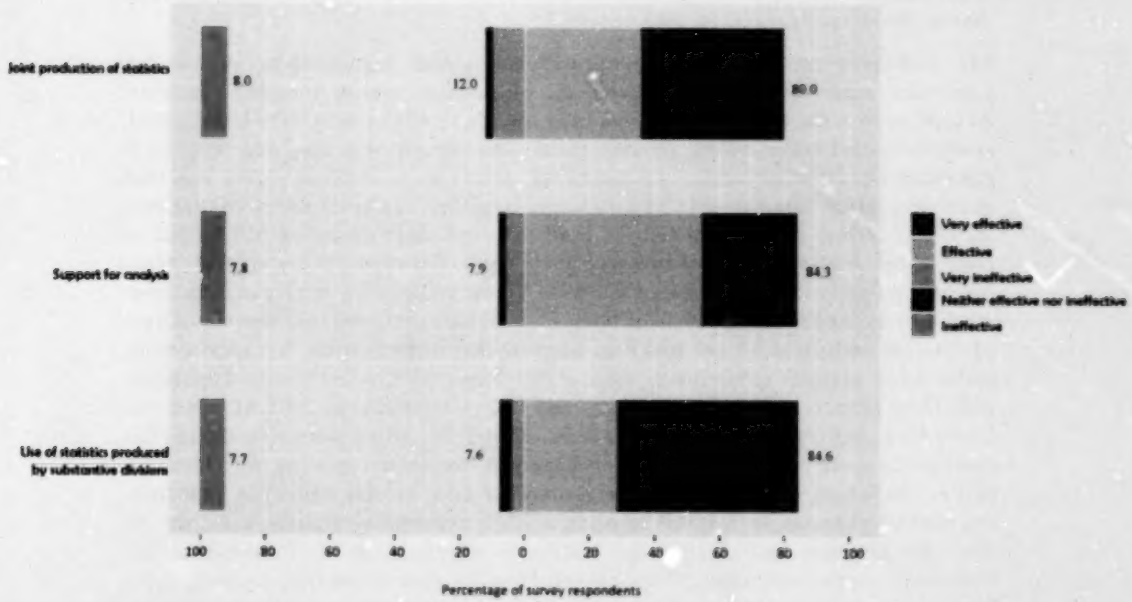
E. While efficiency gains have been achieved through coordination within and among regional commissions, opportunities for further improvement exist

Statistics divisions have been responsive to internal requests for data collection, dissemination and analysis, but there remain untapped opportunities to improve internal coordination and collaboration

42. In addition to working with institutional counterparts, the statistics divisions serve other substantive divisions within the regional commissions and have generally performed well in that regard. A majority of the staff from other

substantive divisions who were surveyed (80 per cent) concurred that the statistics divisions have been largely responsive to their requests for support in their analytical work, as shown in figure V. More specifically, statistics divisions contributed to flagship publications, thematic reports and dissemination platforms by providing key supporting data collected from national statistical offices and secondary sources, undertaking data validation exercises and normalizing existing global data sets to reflect the specificities of the region. Examples of recurrent publications and thematic databases to which a statistical contribution was essential, and where good collaboration and efficiencies were noted by staff of the regional commissions, included: the *Social Panorama of Latin America* of ECLAC; a report entitled *Arab Society: Compendium of Demographic and Social Indicators* by ESCWA; the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean of ECLAC; and the Asia-Pacific Energy Portal of ESCAP. Further integration of statistical work within the regional commissions has occurred through the provision of statistical inputs and/or analyses into statistical databases[7] or statistical yearbooks managed by the statistics divisions.

Figure V
Staff ratings of internal coordination between statistics divisions and other substantive divisions
(Percentage)



Source: Survey of the staff of the regional commissions by the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

43. Notwithstanding such positive examples, including the ECE and ECLAC central databases used by several divisions to process and disseminate data,[8]

[7] As of December 2015, four regional commissions had developed and maintained comprehensive, centralized statistical databases.

[8] For example, the ECE databases on forestry and transport.

collaboration between the statistics divisions and other substantive divisions has not been systematic. Almost one third of the staff of the regional commissions who were interviewed (30 per cent) noted that some divisions collect data with minimal consultation with the statistics division and some independently perform data collection and dissemination, without engaging the statistics division for data validation, and do not streamline their statistics in centralized databases. The staff who were interviewed attributed this to the lack of institutional mechanisms and protocols to facilitate regular consultation. As one example, regional commissions did not typically have procedures in place to ensure consultation and coordination on statistical matters for non-recurrent publications. Staff from other divisions who were interviewed were cognizant of the risks involved in bypassing quality assurance by the statistics divisions: they reported some discrepancies in data sources used for flagship publications that hindered harmonization and the transmission of a coherent message. Data inconsistencies and duplications were illustrated by one example of a regional commission where bottlenecks in the flow of data undermined dissemination across divisions, leading to duplications in data requests to Member States and bypassing the quality assurance check provided by the statistics division.

While there are examples of cross-divisional collaboration to bridge the gap between data users and producers, the gap remains

44. Collaboration among divisions within regional commissions is also an important factor in enhancing greater use of statistics among member countries. According to some of the heads of national statistical offices who were interviewed, cross-divisional collaboration on consensus- and capacity-building had resulted in enhanced coordination among governmental actors at the national level and thus more impactful interventions; by bringing together representatives of national statistical offices and line ministries, statistics and other divisions had helped to connect the producers of statistics with their users. Between 2012 and 2015, some regional commissions had established task forces, comprising staff members from all divisions, under their statistical bodies.[9] Statistics divisions and representatives of national statistical offices had also been invited to participate in expert groups under other sectoral committees, such as the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean at ECLAC and the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry at ECE. There were also limited but noteworthy examples of structured mechanisms for joint reporting to subsidiary bodies, including the ESCAP expert group on disaster risk reduction statistics, established pursuant to ESCAP resolution 70/2, comprising statisticians from its Statistics Division and disaster risk reduction experts from its Information and Communications Technology Division and Disaster Risk Reduction Section; and a joint task force of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians to improve the production and quality of environmental statistics in some member countries.

45. Such structured mechanisms are not, however, found consistently across regional commissions. The representatives of national statistical offices who were

[9] For example, the Working Group on Gender Statistics of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC.

interviewed expressed the need for a more integrated multi-stakeholder approach to help bridge the gap between data producers and users.

Regular channels for collaboration and sharing of experiences between regional commissions on statistics have been limited

46. Collaboration between the regional commissions in statistics has been confined primarily to 18 interregional Development Account projects.[10] Apart from these, there have been few instances of cooperation among regional commissions on common priorities. Efforts to systematize collaboration through, for instance, interregional task forces on statistics or joint capacity-building interventions have been sporadic. Examples include collaboration between ECE and ESCAP on global assessments of national statistical systems and capacity-building for implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (see ECE/CES/2015/15). With regard to knowledge-sharing between regional commissions, the only structured mechanism currently in place is a conference call held once every two months between the chiefs of the statistics divisions and the head of statistics in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. No further systematic coordination occurs across thematic areas, such as economic, social and gender statistics. While there may be some coordination when an activity is organized in a country covered by more than one regional commission, it is not systematic. Also, the risk of duplication was noted by the staff of the regional commissions and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs who were interviewed: as one example, similar training events on the System of National Accounts 2008 were organized by different regional commissions in dual membership countries.

47. With regard to collaboration between United Nations entities, some thematic working groups on statistics have been established under the regional coordination mechanisms, which are convened by the regional commissions. However, beyond some technical discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals, the regional coordination mechanisms are not currently being used to full advantage to enhance inter-agency synergies. The stakeholders who were interviewed also noted the limited coordination and communication on statistical activities at the regional and subregional levels and even within United Nations entities in certain regions.

V. Conclusion

48. Statistics are vital to the work programme of the regional commissions, serving as the cornerstone of their work to facilitate and promote economic, social and environmentally sustainable development. Statistics are needed not only to support the monitoring and measurement of progress made in development, but also to assist Member States in relation to analysis and policymaking with regard to national development plans and agendas. The cumulative strengths of the regional commissions — their intergovernmental frameworks, cross-sectoral mandates and ability to mobilize regional consensus and agreement — make them well suited to play a lead role in improving the quality and use of official statistics at the national

[10] See http://www.un.org/esa/devaccount/projects/active/theme.html and http://www.un.org/esa/devaccount/projects/completed/theme.html.

and international levels, and in facilitating the coordination of international statistical activities.

49. The regional commissions have achieved positive results in providing statistical support to Member States and in integrating their statistical activities into the wider context of their overall work programmes. They have also identified the enhancement of the statistical capacities of Member States in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as one of the seven main roles they envision playing in support of that Agenda. More specifically, they have declared their strategy of providing a holistic institutional framework to steer the regional statistical agenda, through the provision of mandated support to Member States in the development of statistical data and the collection, analysis, dissemination and communication of that data for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The regional commissions have additionally affirmed the need for statistical programmes to be demand-driven, that is, backed by strong country ownership through national statistical offices.

50. In order to play this role well, the regional commissions should further enhance their statistical work. Given the broad scope of the Sustainable Development Goals, expertise will be required across a wide range of sectors, including social, economic, environmental and gender statistics. Opportunities for dialogue and collaboration should therefore be taken in order to explore how the growing assortment of available data sources, including big data, can be used more effectively, and how data integration and new sources can be incorporated into national statistical systems. This is central to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly its regional dimension. The lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals with regard to the need for robust systems for monitoring and measuring achievement of the Goals, as well as the need for regionally relevant indicators, should be applied in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. While it is the responsibility of Member States to track their own progress against the Goals, the support provided by the regional commissions to their networks of national statistical offices is critical to ensuring that the tools, methodologies and capacities at their disposal are sufficiently robust for them to be able to do so.

51. Responding to the increase in demand for statistical support expected as a result of the 2030 Agenda will require more resources, enhanced coordination both within and among the regional commissions and greater synergies and efficiencies in relation to common needs and priorities. Close work with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs will also be required. The opportunities presented by the Sustainable Development Goals can be fully realized only with robust statistical systems providing high-quality official statistics to support them.

VI. Recommendations

52. OIOS makes five main recommendations to the regional commissions, as set out in paragraphs 53 to 57 below.

Recommendation 1 (paras. 14-21)

53. The regional commissions should develop and implement a strategy to enhance the capacity of Member States to disseminate and use statistics at the national level, including guidelines and recommendations, taking into account the regional context. Related activities could include:

(a) Promoting the participation of staff from technical ministries or members of other substantive committees in relevant working groups and task forces of the statistical bodies, including through cross-sectoral capacity-building activities that bring together producers and users of statistics;

(b) Organizing technology workshops that address new and advanced data dissemination methods.

Indicator of achievement: strategy to enhance the capacity of Member States in relation to the dissemination and use of statistics is developed.

Recommendation 2 (paras. 22-23 and 38-41)

54. The regional commissions should develop and implement a strategy to enhance their capacities in support of key statistics, in particular environmental and gender statistics and new statistical areas relating to the Sustainable Development Goals. This strategy should include actions to secure supplementary resources as appropriate and relevant, targeted recruitment of staff with expertise in key statistical areas and temporary recruitment of specialists and regional advisers.

Indicator of achievement: strategy to support the enhancement of capacities for key statistics is developed.

Recommendation 3 (paras. 34-37)

55. The regional commissions should develop region-specific tools, guidelines, frameworks and templates, taking into consideration the guidelines prepared by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS21), in order to strengthen their support to member countries in developing and refining their national statistical plans and national strategies for the development of statistics with a view to ensuring that they incorporate the Goals, priorities and needs of the 2030 Agenda.

Indicator of achievement: increased number of interventions are delivered on integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national statistical plans.

Recommendation 4 (paras. 42-47)

56. The regional commissions should strengthen their internal coordination with regard to the production and dissemination of sectoral data by establishing, among other measures:

(a) A clear plan for and the regular exchange of information on regional activities in statistics;

(b) A clear commission-wide biennial plan for data collection aimed at identifying common data sources to avoid duplication;

(c) Central data management and monitoring to ensure effective collaboration when updating databases within regional commissions.

Indicator of achievement: plans or protocols for internal coordination are developed.

Recommendation 5 (paras. 42–43)

57. Coordination between the regional commissions should be further strengthened to share expertise and experience on common thematic priorities, including the possibility of periodic sharing of information and more joint activities, where feasible.

Indicator of achievement: at least one annual collaboration and sharing initiative is organized between regional commissions per year.

Annex

Responses of the regional commissions to the report on the thematic evaluation

The following comments were received from the regional commissions on the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the thematic evaluation of the regional commissions. They are reproduced herein in line the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee, endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/263.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) thanks the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) for the opportunity to provide comments on the report of the thematic evaluation of the regional commissions. ESCWA recognizes the importance of this thematic evaluation and extends its appreciation to OIOS for its detailed findings and recommendations.

ESCWA welcomes the report's recognition of the key strengths and challenges faced by the regional commissions in support of measuring the achievements and implementation of internationally agreed development goals. Among the key strengths the report cites is the regional commissions' effective support to member States in producing quality statistics and facilitating dialogue, decisions and consensus on the implementation of global and regional statistical norms. The report also highlights the regional commissions' support to member States in reporting on the Millennium Development Goals and in preparations leading up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The report acknowledges the increased demand that will be placed on the regional commissions as they prepare for rigorous monitoring, follow-up and review of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

ESCWA has reviewed the report carefully and generally welcomes its findings and recommendations, in particular with regard to enhancing the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into national statistical plans, enhancing capacities within the regional commissions, supporting the dissemination and use of statistics and strengthening collaboration within and across regional commissions. To this end, ESCWA is preparing a detailed action plan, building on work already under way, as well as initiating new activities in response to the recommendations.

ESCWA is generally in agreement with the recommendations in the report, and would like to add the following observations:

General observation

With a response rate of only 29 per cent (39 out of 134), the results of the survey of national statistical offices may not be sufficiently representative to draw conclusive findings. The evaluation references this survey throughout the report without due acknowledgment of the potential limitations of a relatively small sample.

Recommendation 1

An integrated approach to sustainable development will require timely access and use of statistics using the most advanced data dissemination methods. ESCWA agrees with this recommendation and is committed to promoting the participation of technical ministries in relevant statistical committee meetings and working groups bringing together data producers and users. Within ESCWA, the Statistics Division is working with the Technology for Development Division to design and implement technology workshops.

Recommendation 2

The 2030 Agenda requires enhanced capacities to support key statistics. ESCWA broadly agrees with this recommendation, and will capitalize on Development Account and extrabudgetary resources to enhance its capacity for key statistics, including environment and gender statistics. At the same time, ESCWA considers that the overall structure of resources dedicated to statistics would be better addressed as part of a review of overall statistical resources at the United Nations Secretariat, including resources in the regional commissions and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Recommendation 3

ESCWA agrees with the recommendation, particularly on the importance of strengthening support to member States in the development and refinement of their national statistical plans and national strategies for the development of statistics. ESCWA will continue to undertake assessments of national statistical systems, and will develop guidelines and technical materials to support the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into national statistical plans.

Recommendation 4

ESCWA agrees with the recommendation to strengthen internal coordination within the Commission, and will capitalize on the launch of a new statistical warehouse for data collection and dissemination for that purpose.

Recommendation 5

ESCWA agrees with this recommendation and sees great value in continued exchange and learning among the regional commissions in areas of common interest and priorities. ESCWA will proactively engage with all regional commissions, with a special effort in working with the Economic Commission on Africa in support of common member States.

In conclusion, ESCWA would like to thank OIOS for this comprehensive evaluation report. As it reflects on strategies and modalities to further sharpen its outputs and services, ESCWA will benefit from the findings and recommendations presented in the report.

Economic Commission for Europe

The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) appreciates the efforts of OIOS to integrate the statistical work of the Commission into the review. Herein form the formal comments of ECE to the report.

ECE welcomes this well-written report which recognizes the role and importance of statistical work in the regional commissions. The report argues for more resources to be allocated to statistical work, which is highly appreciated, particularly in the light of the importance of statistics and data in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

At ECE, statistical production and dissemination of data occurs across our subprogrammes, and not just in the statistics subprogramme. While we acknowledge the scope of this exercise and the natural limitations for such reports, the sustainable energy, forestry, transport and environment all produce substantive mandated statistical outputs with direct relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals, which were, unfortunately in our opinion, given inadequate coverage in the final report. This is particularly important given the imperative of driving accessible and high-quality data for supporting member States to report on the broad range of thematic areas contained in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our specific responses to the recommendations follow:

Recommendation 1

We accept this recommendation, and would like to inform you that ECE recently finalized and published a document entitled "Recommendations on promoting, measuring and communicating the value of official statistics", which includes eight strategic recommendations for countries.

Recommendation 2

We accept this recommendation, and will prepare a strategy to support the enhancement of capacities for key statistics developed for the ECE region.

Recommendation 3

We accept this recommendation and will review our existing efforts in this regard to determine where interventions can be delivered on integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national statistical plans, within existing resources, including in our regular budget for technical cooperation.

Recommendation 4

We accept this recommendation and will engage in a discussion with other regional commissions to determine an action plan for ECE in line with this recommendation.

Recommendation 5

We accept this recommendation and, within the broader cooperation of the regional commissions, will review opportunities for increasing collaboration, within existing resources.

Based on clarification received from your office on 1 March 2017, we will prepare the recommendations action plan and revert to you.

ECE would like to take this opportunity to thank OIOS for the collaborative and constructive approach in this and other recent evaluations of the Commission.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) welcomes this comprehensive report, which recognizes the relevance of the statistical work done by the regional commissions. ECLAC accepts the recommendations and will prepare a recommendations action plan with a clear time frame for implementation.

ECLAC would like to take this opportunity to thank OIOS for the collaborative approach in this evaluation.

Recommendation 1

ECLAC accepts this recommendation. In the Latin American and Caribbean region this strategy is being defined jointly with member States of the Statistical Conference of the Americas and ECLAC. However, additional resources would be required in order to finance the participation of a higher number of substantive and technical national staff in regional workshops.

Recommendation 2

ECLAC accepts this recommendation. ECLAC is already working on a strategy to enhance its capacities to support key statistics in the environmental, gender and new statistical areas. However, the full implementation of this strategy requires the availability of additional resources to fund targeted recruitment of staff and temporary recruitment.

Recommendation 3

ECLAC accepts this recommendation. In the context of the Statistical Conference of the Americas, ECLAC is already working with member States in order to develop specific tools, guidelines, frameworks and templates to support the development and refinement of their national statistical plans in order to take into account the Sustainable Development Goals.

Recommendation 4

This recommendation is already being implemented at ECLAC. The CEPALSTAT governance project was defined in 2010 and a working group, coordinated by the Statistics Division, monitors existing statistical databases in

place at ECLAC to avoid duplication. ECLAC will work in the refinement of plans/ protocols to improve internal coordination, in relevant cases.

Recommendation 5

ECLAC accepts this recommendation. Regional commissions already have in place mechanisms to periodically share information and improve coordination. Examples are the bimonthly phone conference among regional commissions and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and side meetings at the sessions of the Statistical Commission. ECLAC will continue to seek opportunities to increasingly share expertise and experience on common thematic priorities with other regional commissions. However, additional resources will be required to fund the organization of a specific event or initiative that would entail staff members travelling to other duty stations.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has no further comments on the report and concurs with its findings and recommendations. In response to the recommendations, ESCAP will prepare an action plan indicating concrete follow-up actions to address those recommendations with a clear time frame for implementation.

We wish to put on record our appreciation to the evaluation team for the participatory and consultative approach to the design and conduct of the evaluation.

Economic Commission for Africa

We are in receipt of the informal draft on the subject evaluation. We have reviewed the report and we concur with the recommendations put forward by the evaluators. We believe that by implementing these recommendations ECA will further strengthen its support to member States in new and emerging statistical areas.

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Substantive session, 5-30 June 2017
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Programme questions: evaluation

Evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) examined the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the field operations of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in terms of the implementation of its mandate to protect and promote human rights. The evaluation was conducted using surveys, interviews, on-site visits, case studies, direct observation, document reviews and secondary data analyses and was focused on four main questions relating to the criteria outlined below.

Human rights is one of the three pillars of the United Nations, and OHCHR plays a leading role in that regard with its broad mandate to protect and promote all human rights for all. The Office has four types of field presence to implement its mandate: regional offices, country offices, human rights advisers in United Nations country teams and human rights components in peacekeeping missions.

Through its field offices, OHCHR has added value with regard to the protection and promotion of human rights in the field, in the countries and regions in which it has worked. The comparative advantages of such offices include the thematic expertise of staff, their links with the global human rights mechanisms and standards, the assistance they provide to countries in fulfilling their human rights commitments and obligations, and the neutrality and legitimacy of the offices.

* E/AC.51/2017/1.

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Through its field presences, OHCHR has contributed to sustainable human rights outcomes in the countries and regions in which it has worked, including through the creation and strengthening of human rights institutions, the drafting and passing of laws that are consistent with international standards, the provision of direct assistance in the implementation of constitutional reform and the development of national human rights plans and policies. OHCHR field offices have also supported countries in their engagement with the international human rights mechanisms. Such offices have, however, not been able to consistently provide follow-up support and guidance for the implementation of recommendations arising from those mechanisms, in particular from the special procedures. Within the United Nations system, OHCHR field presences have contributed to the enhanced integration of human rights into common processes, such as common country assessments and United Nations development assistance plans.

Although its field presence has increased, the Office has been unable to meet some requests for support from countries and United Nations country teams, and the support provided to the majority of countries in which it is present is typically limited owing to thinly staffed country and regional offices. Further, notwithstanding its global mandate for promotion and protection, OHCHR has been unable to carry out protection activities to the same extent as promotion activities owing to internal and external factors, such as resource constraints, the lack of political will, less proactive leadership in field offices and the lack of specific country office or regional office agreements.

Although OHCHR has a common framework for planning and reporting to facilitate coherence among its broad mandate, thematic priorities and field activities, it still lacks an overall plan for the efficient deployment of its field operations.

OIOS makes four important recommendations to OHCHR:

(a) Reassess, reconsider and develop options for future arrangements for human rights advisers;

(b) Develop an overarching deployment strategy for OHCHR field presences;

(c) Strengthen internal knowledge management;

(d) Improve procedures for providing support to Member States in following up on the implementation of recommendations.

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I. Introduction and objective

1. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for evaluation on the basis of a risk assessment undertaken to identify programme evaluation priorities. The Committee for Programme and Coordination selected the programme evaluation of OHCHR for consideration at its fifty-seventh session, to be held in June 2017 (see A/70/16). The General Assembly endorsed the selection in its resolution 70/8.

2. The general frame of reference for OIOS is set out in General Assembly resolutions 48/218B, 54/244 and 59/272, as well as the bulletin of the Secretary-General on the establishment of OIOS (ST/SGB/273), which authorizes OIOS to initiate, carry out and report on any action that it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. Evaluation by OIOS is provided in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (see ST/SGB/2016/6, regulation 7.1).

3. The overall objective of the evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of OHCHR field operations in implementing the Office's protection and promotion mandates. The evaluation topic emerged from a programme-level risk assessment described in the evaluation inception paper.[1] The evaluation has been conducted in conformity with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations system.[2]

4. Comments from OHCHR were sought on the draft report and taken into account in the final report. The formal response of OHCHR is included in the annex to the present document.

II. Background

A. History and mandate

5. Human rights constitute one of the three pillars of the Charter of the United Nations, along with peace and security and development. The position of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was created by General Assembly resolution 48/141 in December 1993, following the recommendation contained in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The High Commissioner, who is of the rank of Under-Secretary-General, is appointed by the Secretary-General and approved by the General Assembly. She or he is charged to be the United Nations official with principal responsibility for United Nations human rights activities, with a mandate to promote and protect the effective enjoyment by all of all civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

[1] OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division inception paper: programme evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, assignment No. IED-16-010 (1 July 2016).

[2] Reissued by the United Nations Evaluation Group in 2016.

6. Other elements of the mandate of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which is carried out by the Office of the High Commissioner, include:

(a) Carrying out the tasks assigned to him or her by the competent bodies of the United Nations system;

(b) Providing advisory services and technical assistance, at the request of the State concerned, with a view to supporting actions and programmes in the field of human rights;

(c) Engaging in dialogue with Governments with a view to securing respect for all human rights;

(d) Coordinating the human rights promotion and protection activities throughout the United Nations system.

7. The Office is responsible for providing substantial and technical support to the following human rights mechanisms:

(a) The Human Rights Council, which was created in 2006 as the principal intergovernmental body on human rights and a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly. The Council is composed of 47 member States, elected by the majority of members of the General Assembly through direct and secret ballot;

(b) The universal periodic review of the Human Rights Council, which comprises a review of the human rights record of all 193 Member States;

(c) The special procedures of the Human Rights Council, which are independent human rights experts with mandates to report and provide advice on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective;

(d) The treaty bodies, which are committees of experts that monitor the implementation of the nine core international human rights treaties.

B. Governance and structure

8. The High Commissioner for Human Rights is supported by the Deputy High Commissioner, who leads all the support functions of the office in Geneva, and an Assistant Secretary-General, who represents OHCHR at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

9. The Office carries out human rights field activities and operations. There are currently four types of field presence, in 59 locations: regional offices (12), country offices (15), human rights components in peacekeeping missions (14) and human rights advisers in United Nations country teams (18). The regional and country offices are stand-alone entities that are managed solely by OHCHR. The human rights components in peacekeeping operations are implemented in collaboration with other United Nations entities and have dual reporting lines, as is the case with the human rights advisers.

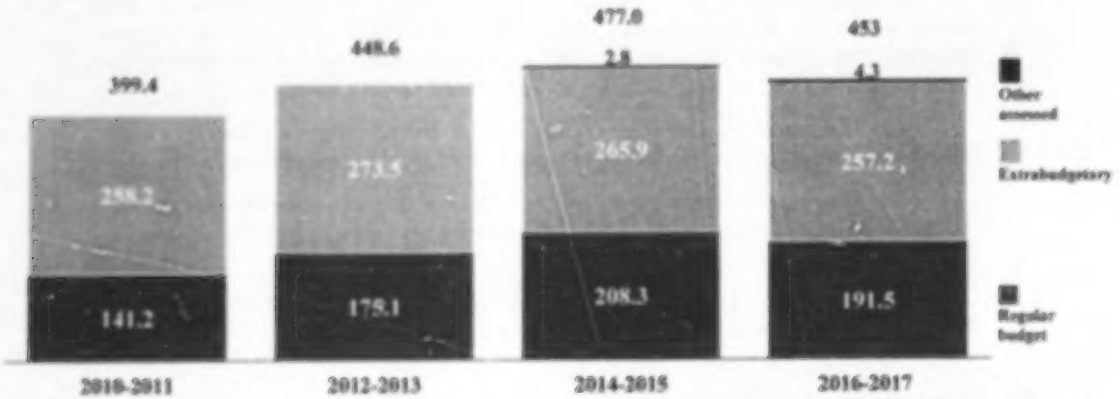
10. The field presence of OHCHR has expanded considerably since the establishment of the post of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, with the largest expansion occurring between 2000 and 2006. During that time, the number of countries with all four types of field presence, excluding technical cooperation

offices and projects, increased from 14 to 37. From 2009 to 2016, although the rate of expansion slowed, the presence of human rights components in peacekeeping missions and human rights advisers increased.

C. Resources

11. As shown in figure I, the regular budget of OHCHR grew between the bienniums of 2010-2011 and 2014-2015 and declined in 2016-2017. Extrabudgetary funds constitute on average 56 per cent of the total budget of OHCHR. Field operations are financed 90 per cent by extrabudgetary funds.

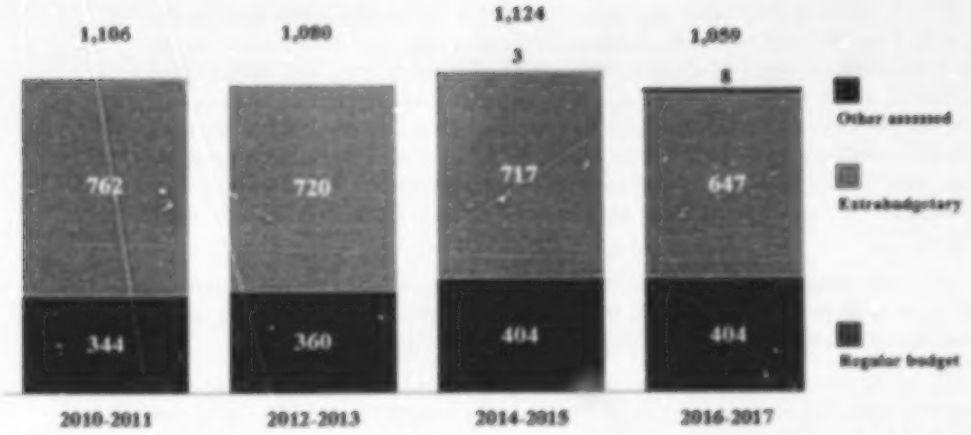
Figure I
Financial resources of the Office, 2010-2017
(Millions of United States dollars)



Sources: A/64/6 (Sect. 23), A/66/6 (Sect. 24) and Corr.1, A/68/6 (Sect. 24), A/70/6 (Sect. 24) and Corr.1 and A/70/6/Add.1.

12. Figure II shows that the total number of OHCHR posts have averaged around 1,100 during the past four bienniums, with posts funded by the regular budget increasing from 344 to 404 and posts funded by extrabudgetary resources decreasing from 762 to 647.

Figure II
Posts of the Office, 2010-2017



Sources: A/64/6 (Sect. 23), A/66/6 (Sect. 24) and Corr.1, A/68/6 (Sect. 24), A/70/6 (Sect. 24) and Corr.1 and A/70/6/Add.1.

III. Methodology

13. The present evaluation was focused on the following four questions:

(a) To what extent have the activities of OHCHR field operations been relevant in the countries and regions in which it has worked in terms of adding value in the field and meeting the needs of external stakeholders?

(b) How efficiently have OHCHR structures and resources facilitated the implementation of human rights mandates at the country and regional levels, in particular by having in place the strategy and structures necessary to ensure the maximum use of resources and the integration of headquarters and field activities?

(c) How effective have OHCHR field presences been in promoting and protecting human rights at the country and regional levels, in particular by contributing to specific human rights outcomes in the field and mainstreaming human rights into the work of the United Nations country teams?

(d) How effective have OHCHR field operations been in implementing the norms that are supported and facilitated by headquarters, in particular by supporting Member States in fulfilling their commitments to international human rights norms and mechanisms and assisting with the follow-up to recommendations?

14. Human rights components in peacekeeping missions were not covered in the present evaluation, because this type of field presence will be evaluated by the Inspection and Evaluation Division of OIOS in 2017.

15. The present evaluation was focused on the past six years, with a more in-depth assessment of the period 2014-2016. All evaluation results are triangulated with multiple data sources. The following combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used in the evaluation:

(a) Missions to Geneva, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Panama, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Tunisia;

(b) A total of 180 semi-structured interviews, at headquarters and in the field, with OHCHR staff (49 staff members in Geneva and New York and 55 in the field), Permanent Missions of Member States to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva (10), national Government representatives (17, in six field presences), representatives of local civil society (17, in six field presences), members of United Nations country teams and regional organizations (26, in six field presences), representatives of international non-governmental organizations (3, in Geneva) and international donors (3, based in two field presences);

(c) Web-based surveys of a non-random sample of OHCHR staff at headquarters and in the field;[3] and a non-random sample of independent experts from the treaty bodies and special procedures of the Human Rights Council;[4]

(d) A structured review of key documentation, including OHCHR regional and country notes, field presence end-of-year reports, annual country reports to the Human Rights Council, the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and minutes from the annual meetings of heads of field presences.

(e) In-depth case studies of 17 field presences (37 per cent of the total number of field presences);[5]

(f) Secondary data analyses of OHCHR programme data, evaluations, budget information, programme performance reporting data and regional and country reports.

IV. Evaluation results

A. The Office has played a critical and highly relevant role in the field that no other actor has played

The Office has added value with regard to the protection and promotion of human rights in the field, in the countries and regions in which it has operated

16. The representatives from civil society, government entities and United Nations country teams, independent experts and staff who were interviewed and surveyed agreed that OHCHR field offices played a unique role with regard to human rights in the field. They identified three main comparative advantages of OHCHR: (a) it is the custodian of international human rights standards and mechanisms; (b) field offices are seen as having credibility and legitimacy in the field of human rights;

[3] The staff survey was sent to a non-random sample of 1,379 staff; 585 responded (a 42 per cent response rate).

[4] The expert survey was sent to a non-random sample of 241 individuals; 110 responded (a 46 per cent response rate).

[5] Five country offices: Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala, Guinea and Tunisia; six regional offices: Central America, Central Asia, West Africa, East Africa, South-East Asia and the Middle East; and six human rights advisers: based in the Dominican Republic, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Sri Lanka and southern Caucasus.

and (c) field offices can bring together different stakeholders. Such advantages were also highlighted in the evaluation of the regional office for Central Asia, covering the period 2010-2013, in which it was determined that OHCHR was perceived as a neutral organization that credibly raised human rights concerns with the state authorities while also working impartially with civil society.

17. Civil society representatives highlighted in particular that OHCHR offered a unique service by playing a bridging role and bringing together polarized groups with different human rights perspectives. For example, in Thailand, OHCHR formally conveyed the concerns of civil society to the Government, and, in Panama and Guatemala, OHCHR has mediated between the Government and indigenous groups.

18. Government and civil society representatives identified the authority, credibility and legitimacy of OHCHR field offices as the main elements that enabled OHCHR to add value. Such characteristics permeated the interactions of OHCHR with stakeholders, enabling it to influence national human rights debates. For example, interviewees mentioned that public statements of OHCHR, because it is a part of the United Nations, carried greater legitimacy than those of civil society actors who also voiced their human rights concerns. Compared to other United Nations entities, OHCHR was better disposed to convey difficult messages and use its voice when confronted with human rights violations. Government interviewees in Guatemala and Panama agreed that even though Governments did not always appreciate criticism from OHCHR, the credibility and legitimacy of the OHCHR field presence enabled it to give criticism without damaging important government relationships.

19. For the members of United Nations country teams, staff and independent experts who were interviewed, the main added value of OHCHR field presences was seen as the support they provided, as custodians of international human rights standards and mechanisms, to countries in fulfilling their commitments and obligations to the treaty bodies, the universal periodic review process and special procedures. They considered OHCHR to be best placed among United Nations agencies to provide guidance on human rights law and treaties. For staff, this comparative advantage was viewed as even more important, because they considered that the support of field presences was crucial in helping countries to navigate the international human rights machinery and understand the numerous recommendations issued by the human rights mechanisms.

The Office has demonstrated its relevance by largely meeting the needs and expectations of its stakeholders in the field

20. The principal stakeholders of OHCHR, namely, State organs, the United Nations system and regional organizations with human rights responsibilities, reported that their needs and expectations had largely been met. The majority of individuals interviewed (83 per cent) stated that OHCHR was meeting the expectations of all or some of its major stakeholders. In meeting such expectations, OHCHR has been able, for the most part, to navigate and satisfy the often opposing needs of two of its main stakeholders, Government and civil society. Civil society tended to favour a strong monitoring capacity of OHCHR, whereas Governments often preferred a greater focus on technical assistance. Other staff remarked that

stakeholders were seldom monolithic and that work on human rights with government actors may require identifying those government counterparts that were more willing to work with OHCHR at a given point in time. In Guatemala, for example, during a period in which the Government was generally less willing to be an active partner, the country office found human rights champions in the courts and the judicial system.

B. Field presences of the Office have contributed to human rights outcomes at the country and regional levels and the mainstreaming of human rights in the United Nations system

The Office reported good progress in attaining its objectives, and stakeholders viewed its overall performance positively

21. In the current 2014-2017 programming cycle, OHCHR field presences have reported progress in the achievement of their expected accomplishments, as identified in the OHCHR Management Plan 2014-2017.[6] In the first year of the cycle, from 2014 to 2015, the number of accomplishments rated as "good progress" increased in all three types of field presence in the 17 case studies.[7] As shown in table 1, for country offices, the increase in expected accomplishments rated as "good progress" was approximately 48 per cent, for regional offices, 72 per cent and for human rights advisers, approximately 38 per cent.

Table 1
The number of expected accomplishments rated as "good progress" increased in the 17 case studies of field presences[8]

	2014	*2015*
Country offices		
Cancelled	4	7
No progress	9	17
Some progress	41	23
Good progress	27	40
Partially or fully achieved	10	10
Regional offices		
Cancelled	–	–
No progress	7	8
Some progress	43	16
Good progress	28	48
Partially or fully achieved	2	8

[6] See OHCHR, "OHCHR Management Plan 2014-2017".
[7] Expected accomplishments are identified in the end-of-year reports that are produced annually by all field presences. The performance ratings are no progress, some progress, good progress and partially or fully achieved.
[8] Data from 2016 were unavailable at the time of analysis.

	2014	2015
Human rights advisers		
Cancelled	–	–
No progress	11	2
Some progress	8	13
Good progress	13	18
Partially or fully achieved	2	1

Sources: Country and regional notes and end-of-year reports (2014 and 2015) for 16 of the 17 case studies of field presences, available from the OHCHR intranet.

22. External stakeholders and staff rated highly the performance of OHCHR in the field. Most of the external stakeholders who were interviewed (71 per cent) considered OHCHR to be effective, whereas only 13 per cent said that OHCHR field presences were underperforming. Staff also assessed their work in the field positively, albeit to a lesser extent than external stakeholders, with just under half (47 per cent) being of the view that field presences contributed to sustainable human rights outcomes. The remaining staff maintained that it was impossible to generalize because some field presences performed better than others.

Field presences of the Office are supporting human rights outcomes at the country and regional levels

23. Through its field presences, OHCHR has contributed in several ways to the advancement of human rights in a country or region, including by:

(a) Improving the compliance of national laws, policies and institutions with human rights standards;

(b) Promoting the ratification of international human rights treaties;

(c) Supporting the establishment and functioning of protection and accountability mechanisms;

(d) Supporting institutions and laws aimed at combating discrimination;

(e) Encouraging the use of national protection systems by rights-holders;

(f) Integrating the human rights-based approach into the work of other United Nations agencies.

24. There are numerous examples across all types of field presence of the way in which OHCHR has contributed to significant and sustainable human rights results (see table 2).

Table 2
Examples of the contribution by selected field presences of the Office to country and regional outcomes

Field presence	*Example of contribution to outcomes*
Regional offices	
Central America	Use of the Latin American Model Protocol for the Investigation of Gender-related Killing of Women
South-East Asia	Monitoring of civil society, and documenting and reporting of cases of torture in detention facilities in Thailand
Central Asia	Improved accountability of judicial actors through the monitoring of trials
	Establishment of a national coordination council on human rights and strengthening of the national preventive mechanism against torture in Kyrgyzstan
West Africa	Legislation for gender equality in political representation
Middle East	Act on migrant domestic workers, in line with international standards, in Kuwait
Country offices	
Cambodia	Private sector engagement with local communities regarding land disputes
Colombia	Victims and Land Restitution Act
	Human rights policy of the Ministry of Defence
Guatemala	Access for the indigenous population to the courts and justice system
	Inclusion of human rights in the constitutional reform process
Mexico	Constitutional amendment relating to human rights
	Development of human rights indicators for public policies
Tunisia	Prison reform
	Inclusion of human rights in the constitutional reform process
Human rights advisers	
Dominican Republic	Deportations in line with international human rights standards
Malawi	National human rights action plan
Sri Lanka	Transitional justice tools and mechanisms

Source: End-of-year reports for 2014 and 2015, lessons learned from the project on human rights protection for conflict prevention and stability in the south of Kyrgyzstan, covering the period 2014-2015, and OHCHR internal evaluations.

The Office has contributed to the mainstreaming of human rights in United Nations country teams

25. All United Nations organizations have a duty to incorporate a human rights approach into their country planning. As the lead agency on human rights and with its link to the global human rights framework, OHCHR has played a vital role in the mainstreaming of human rights in United Nations country teams. All 17 of the field presences reviewed had at least one expected accomplishment related to the mainstreaming of human rights into the work of the United Nations and had advocated a more significant place for human rights in United Nations common country assessments and development assistance plans. In all 17 field presences, human rights had been mentioned in the most recent development assistance plan, and, in 10 of those field presences, human rights had been given priority in the document. For example, in 2014, work by the country office in Cambodia contributed to the incorporation of governance and human rights into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2016-2018 as one of three priority outcomes. The conclusion of the evaluation of human rights advisers by OHCHR in 2016 was that human rights advisers had been successful in mainstreaming the human rights-based approach into development assistance frameworks.[9]

26. United Nations partners and OHCHR staff in the field agreed that the Office was a valuable collaborator in mainstreaming human rights into the work of the Organization. Of the 13 members of United Nations country teams interviewed, 12 considered OHCHR support in the mainstreaming of human rights to be useful. Similarly, all former and current resident coordinators interviewed in Guatemala, Panama, Sri Lanka and Thailand agreed that the Office provided valuable support in the analysis of the national social and political context from a human rights perspective. OHCHR staff also graded themselves highly in that regard, with almost three quarters considering the Office to be successful and 70 per cent regarding OHCHR support in mainstreaming as very or somewhat effective. Nevertheless, almost 20 per cent of staff said that the success of the Office in the mainstreaming of human rights in country teams was dependent on working with a resident coordinator who understood or was interested in furthering the human rights agenda.

C. The Office has effectively supported countries in fulfilling their commitments to international human rights standards and mechanisms, but has provided more limited support to Member States in following up on recommendations

The support of field presences in relation to standards and mechanisms has been strong

27. The Office has contributed to results in the following three areas: (a) supporting States in their compliance and engagement with international human rights mechanisms; (b) supporting the engagement of national human rights institutions and civil society with the human rights mechanisms; and

[9] See OHCHR, "Evaluation of the programmes supported by the human rights advisers" (2015).

(c) strengthening coherence and collaboration among United Nations entities in engagement with the international human rights mechanisms. It has had more mixed results with regard to a fourth area, namely, increasing the ratification of treaties and the review of reservations. All 17 field presences reviewed provided technical assistance to countries in at least one of the four above-mentioned areas, and most external stakeholders interviewed (53 per cent) and staff surveyed (81 per cent) rated as effective the support provided by OHCHR to Member States in fulfilling their commitments to international human rights mechanisms.

28. OHCHR field presences were instrumental in assisting States in fulfilling their reporting obligations to human rights mechanisms. In order to institutionalize the reporting process, field presences have advocated permanent national mechanisms to enable States to prepare for the universal periodic reviews and reports to treaty bodies. In 5 of the 17 field presences reviewed, permanent national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up have been established. For example, between 2013 and 2016, Guinea, with the help of the country office, submitted 5 of 15 overdue reports to treaty bodies. In Tunisia, OHCHR helped to establish a national coordination mechanism and provided technical advice and training to its secretariat and drafting committees. In the remaining 12 field presences, where such mechanisms have been established on a more ad hoc basis, OHCHR advocated the permanent establishment thereof. In addition, the technical assistance provided by the treaty body capacity-building programme of OHCHR, in line with General Assembly resolution 68/268, through the deployment of 10 staff members to regional offices, has helped countries to better engage with treaty bodies, as evidenced by an increasing number of submissions or updates to common core documents and replies to the lists of issues submitted (see A/71/118).

29. OHCHR field presences also significantly increased the engagement of civil society with human rights mechanisms. All 17 field presences were involved in providing some form of support to civil society organizations, including capacity-building and guidance on the drafting of shadow reports, and filing complaints with special rapporteurs. For example, in 2016, as a result of training provided by OHCHR on reporting to treaty bodies, Tunisian civil society organizations submitted periodic reports to three committees of the treaty bodies.

30. Furthermore, OHCHR contributed to the increasing systematic engagement of United Nations country teams with international human rights mechanisms. Of the 17 field presences studied, 12 were involved in supporting country teams in one or both of the following areas: coordination and drafting of a country team report to be submitted to human right mechanisms and coordination of human rights working groups. In 2015, in 8 of the 12 field presences that provided such support, the country team submitted reports to treaty bodies committees or the universal periodic review. OHCHR has also been a member of the Human Rights Working Group of the United Nations Development Group, which is co-led by the Deputy High Commissioner of OHCHR and examines how agencies can improve their engagement with the United Nations human rights mechanisms. In addition, OHCHR reported that it had established a task force focusing on procedures for strengthening the dissemination of recommendations.

31. The technical assistance and advocacy work of OHCHR on the ratification of international human rights treaties and the review of reservations, the primary

responsibility for which lies with States, has produced more mixed results. Globally, human rights treaty ratifications and declarations increased by only 5 per cent from 2013 to 2015 (see A/71/118, annex I). Of the 17 field presences reviewed, 10 were involved in providing support in that area, of which 7 made very limited or no progress. For example, notwithstanding the sustained advocacy by the Regional Office for East Africa, both Djibouti and Ethiopia have yet to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. From 2014 to 2016, the Regional Office for West Africa worked on the ratification of 19 international human rights instruments in six countries, but only 3 were ratified.

Follow-up support for the implementation of recommendations arising from the human rights mechanisms was more limited

32. Countries are ultimately responsible for the implementation of recommendations from the human rights mechanisms. Nevertheless, OHCHR field presences provide follow-up support, guidance and advice to help countries to fulfil their obligations. The high volume and variability of such recommendations, however, make it challenging for field presences to provide follow-up support. The country and regional notes of all 17 field presences reviewed showed that the involvement of OHCHR in the follow-up to recommendations from all three mechanisms, namely, the universal periodic review, the treaty bodies and special procedures, was limited during the four-year programming cycle, as shown in table 3 below.[10] Such a limitation in the follow-up to recommendations has also been a consistent theme in the annual meetings of heads of field presences.[11] In the survey of independent experts from the treaty bodies and special procedures of the Human Rights Council, 47 per cent considered the support provided by OHCHR to follow up on recommendations arising from special procedures in particular to be ineffective or very ineffective. Furthermore, although resources are dedicated to supporting follow-up on the recommendations of treaty bodies, through the treaty body capacity-building programme, and on recommendations from the universal periodic review, through its voluntary trust fund, no resources are dedicated to supporting follow-up on recommendations from special procedures.

[10] Country notes often, but not always, make explicit reference to a recommendation from the universal periodic review, a treaty body or a special procedure being followed up. Even though OHCHR might also address the follow-up to recommendations through other activities, such as the provision of technical advice, this might not be reflected in formal country and regional notes.

[11] OIOS analysis of minutes from the meetings of heads of field presence, covering the period 2010-2015.

Table 3
Follow-up on recommendations from the universal period review, treaty bodies and special procedures in the 17 case studies of field presences, 2000-2015

	Country office	*Human rights adviser*	*Regional office*
Total recommendations from the universal periodic review	1 156	1 659	9 269
Number of recommendations from the universal periodic review followed up	86	108	133
Total recommendations from treaty bodies	1 408	2 102	8 608
Number of recommendations from treaty bodies followed up	59	26	195
Total recommendations from special procedures	499	207	1 114
Number of recommendations from special procedures followed up	22	14	36

Sources: Universal Human Rights Index website and country notes for all 17 case studies of field presences.

33. Notwithstanding the challenges noted above, OHCHR field presences have been taking steps to enhance procedures for following up on recommendations from human rights mechanisms, including through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. For example, the country office in Guatemala organized all recommendations by thematic area in order that members of the United Nations country team could select and use relevant recommendations, and the Regional Office for West Africa clustered and prioritized recommendations from the universal periodic review and some recommendations from the treaty bodies with their respective indicators and timelines in the context of the national human rights action plan of Senegal. Many field presences cluster and prioritize recommendations in order to sort through the large number of often overlapping recommendations. Furthermore, some field presences have assisted States in developing portals that track the progress of recommendations. For example, in Paraguay, the human rights adviser was instrumental in setting up a portal for monitoring implementation that provides information regarding the entity responsible for and the status of implementation.

D. Gaps existed in the geographical coverage of the field presences of the Office and the delivery of its protection mandate

Gaps still exist in the geographic coverage of the Office

34. In the OHCHR Plan of Action of 2005, implementation gaps were identified with regard to the Office's overarching goal to support all countries with a United Nations presence. Even though OHCHR has increased its presence in the field in the past 10 years, coverage gaps remained.

35. As noted in table 4, OHCHR is far from achieving the goal of providing support to all countries. With regard to the 117 countries with a United Nations country team,[12] OHCHR has a country office in 15, a regional office, through which

[12] Countries with United Nations country teams (131) minus countries with peacekeeping missions (14). Human rights components of peacekeeping missions also engage with country teams and resident coordinators.

it provides support remotely or indirectly, in 52 and a human rights adviser in 18. In 22 countries, OHCHR provided no operational support through a field presence, including in countries with very large populations and countries, such as Caribbean countries, that fell outside the purview of the two relevant regional offices. Furthermore, OHCHR did not cover any country that did not have a country team, including most of Europe and North America, not even at the level of a regional office.[13]

Table 4
Almost 20 per cent of countries with a United Nations country team are not covered by any field presence of the Office

	Number	*Percentage*
Countries covered remotely by a regional office	52	44
Countries hosting a regional office	10	9
Countries covered by a country office[a]	15	13
Countries covered by a human rights adviser	18[b]	15
Countries not covered by any field presence	22	19
Total	**117**	**100**

Sources: United Nations Development Group list of countries with a United Nations country team (2016), regional notes and OIOS analysis.

[a] Including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which is covered remotely by the country office in South Korea.

[b] Excluding the human rights advisers in Bangladesh, the Russian Federation and the United Republic of Tanzania, all of which were discontinued in 2016.

36. In the absence of a country office, regional offices provided countries with support from a nearby location. Nevertheless, as a result of the limited number of staff members deployed to regional offices, the depth and breadth of such support is also limited. On average, one staff member of a regional office supports two countries. In certain regions, such as the Pacific and West Africa, that ratio increases to more than three countries per individual. For example, one staff member supports Indonesia remotely from the regional office in Bangkok, and, given that it is such a large country with an active Government and civil society organization stakeholders, the support that OHCHR can provide is limited. Furthermore, countries hosting a regional office tend to receive a disproportionate amount of support compared to other countries in that region. In the Regional Office for Central Asia, for example, it was estimated that 90 per cent of work time is spent on Kyrgyzstan.[14] The same point was also noted in the review by the Joint Inspection Unit of the management and administration of OHCHR (see A/70/68).

The delivery of the protection mandate has been uneven in the field

37. The overarching mandate of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as set out in General Assembly resolution 48/141, is to both promote and protect human

[13] The coverage of countries in those areas from headquarters was limited.

[14] See OHCHR, "Evaluation of the regional office for Central Asia 2010-2013" (2014).

rights. All field presences should therefore be able to carry out activities relating to the promotion and protection of human rights. The delivery of the protection mandate has, however, been uneven in the field. The protection goal has been defined in the Office's Plan of Action of 2005 as an outcome by which rights are acknowledged, respected and fulfilled by those under a duty to do so and as a result of which dignity and freedom are enhanced.[15] Protection can therefore encompass a range of activities, from building stronger laws and institutions that protect rights to more direct action aimed at protecting vulnerable individuals and groups. Many OHCHR staff interviewed stated that protection includes the monitoring and direct observation of potential rights violations and the use of that information to advocate the protection of those at risk. Nevertheless, they also noted that some countries may be hesitant to agree to such activities.

38. Of the 17 field presences reviewed, five country offices have a specific agreement with the country to carry out protection activities covering observation, monitoring, reporting, advice and technical cooperation. In Colombia, for example, through an assessment of the office, it was reported that the positive changes promoted by the office in the human rights policies of the country arose from the ability of the office to combine observation and advice with reporting. In Guatemala, OHCHR conducted joint monitoring missions with the national human rights agency that were perceived positively by members of that agency.

39. The agreements that regional offices have with host countries do not include explicit references to the full range of protection activities to be performed, including monitoring, reporting and observation. Human rights advisers under the responsibility of the resident coordinators also do not have specific agreements with countries in that regard. Nevertheless, some of the regional offices and human rights advisers interviewed for the present evaluation did identify opportunities to carry out some protection activities, such as monitoring political and electoral events and repatriations, by working with individual human rights champions within Governments.

40. Several factors, both internal and external, accounted for the uneven delivery of the protection mandate in the field, including the absence of a specific protection agreement for the OHCHR field presence, the lack of political will, potential tensions with the United Nations country team and less proactive leadership of OHCHR. With regard to the last factor, some staff members and stakeholders in the field stated that heads of field presences varied in terms of how vigorous they were in engaging Governments and facilitating dialogue with regard to the protection mandate of OHCHR.

Resource constraints have contributed to the gaps in delivery by the Office

41. The human rights pillar was by far the least resourced of the three pillars of the United Nations. This fact has been noted in a number of documents, including the evaluation by the Joint Inspection Unit in 2014, in which it was stated that approximately 3 per cent of the United Nations regular budget was devoted to human rights and that many Member States and the Office itself regarded that

[15] See OHCHR, "The OHCHR Plan of Action: Protection and Empowerment" (2005), p. 12.

amount as insufficient (see A/70/68).[16] Furthermore, OHCHR has seen an increase in the number of mandated activities without a corresponding increase in funding. In 2016 alone, the Human Rights Council adopted more than 100 resolutions (compared to approximately 50 in 2007), in many of which it called on OHCHR to draft new reports or convene new meetings and panels. For some of the resolutions a statement of programme budget implication was issued to detail the additional costs. Nevertheless, in a review of 45 randomly selected resolutions from 2016, in all of them, the High Commissioner for Human Rights was asked to carry out the request within existing resources.

42. OHCHR has also been unable to meet the demand for its field presences. In 2016, OHCHR received written requests for the deployment of eight human rights advisers and one country office to which it was unable to respond owing to the lack of resources.

43. Resource constraints in particular have contributed to an unstable situation in relation to human rights advisers. There are two groups of human rights advisers: first generation advisers, who were deployed in 2010-2012,[17] and second generation advisers, who were deployed after 2012 through the United Nations Development Group strategy for the deployment of human rights advisers to resident coordinators and United Nations country teams.[18] Under the strategy, it was proposed that country teams would cover 50 per cent of the salary of the human rights advisers in the second year and 100 per cent in the third year. This did not, however, occur, and many country teams were unable to contribute their share. As a result, nine human rights advisers had to resort to last-minute ad hoc solutions in order to be able to continue operating.[19] The Office expects that at least six of the human rights advisers will likely not continue operating beyond June 2017. Some first-generation human rights advisers are also in financial distress. In Sri Lanka, for example, the stakeholders interviewed expressed surprise that, given the complex transitional justice issues facing the country, a stable contractual situation for the human rights adviser had not yet been found.

44. There was a strong sense among external stakeholders that the financial resources of OHCHR were inadequate. Some 78 per cent of the external stakeholders interviewed believed that the current funding was insufficient and 90 per cent of the staff interviewed expressed concerns about the current levels of funding of OHCHR.

45. Part of the funding challenges in OHCHR is linked to a growing trend for earmarked funding. In 2015, the proportion of unearmarked funding decreased to 37 per cent (from 47 per cent in 2014 and 54 per cent in 2013) of total income received,[20] which reduced the flexibility of OHCHR to deliver fully on its mandate.

[16] The regular budget of OHCHR is 3 per cent of the United Nations regular budget. Other United Nations entities also engage in some human rights-related activities.

[17] See OHCHR, "Revised OHCHR Policy on Human Rights Advisers: Standard Operational Framework" (23 December 2010).

[18] See United Nations Development Group, "United Nations Development Group Strategy for the Deployment of Human Rights Advisers to Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams" (2012).

[19] See OHCHR, "Evaluation of the programmes supported by the human rights advisers" (2015).

[20] See OHCHR, "United Nations Human Rights Appeal 2016".

46. In a change from previous policy, field presences have been encouraged to carry out fundraising activities locally in order to diversify the donor pool.[21] Of the 17 field presences reviewed, 14 have engaged in fundraising. Nevertheless, the field staff interviewed identified two main risks associated with the new policy, namely, further imbalances in coverage as a result of success or failure in fundraising drives and less time spent on substantive activities by field staff owing to the need to spend time on fundraising activities. The conclusion of the evaluation of the regional office for Central Asia, which has been quite successful in generating project funds, was that such success could contribute to potential tension between OHCHR-wide priorities and donor project priorities.

47. Furthermore, the low level of heads of field presences has limited the visibility and reach of OHCHR. Of the 17 field presences reviewed, 15 were headed by staff members at the P-5 level and the remaining 2, at the D-1 and P-4 levels. This has created challenges in gaining an equal footing with other heads of United Nations entities in the field and in engaging senior government officials. For example, participants in the United Nations Development Group regional quarterly review, which is a mechanism that examines all countries on a regular basis for early warnings signs of human rights violations, must be at the director level, thus excluding heads of regional offices of OHCHR. Other entities, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the field offices of which were mostly headed at the director level, typically have staff members at a higher level in comparable positions.

E. The Office has introduced a more uniform structure for the implementation of its field activities, but still lacks an overall plan for the efficient deployment of its field operations

48. The Office has introduced a common framework for the planning and reporting of its activities that has created coherence among its broad mandate, thematic priorities and field presences. Its programming cycle, which comprises OHCHR-wide strategic planning and monitoring, uses three main tools: workplans, country notes and end-of-year reports. Clear guidelines have been developed for all of those tools. All of the 17 field presences reviewed had log frames, most of which (14) were assessed as being of high quality. Some of the constructive features noted in such frames included clear and explicit links between resources, activities, outputs and expected accomplishments, and their alignment with broader organizational thematic priorities. The remaining three log frames were assessed as being of medium quality, primarily because of the less obvious alignment between activities and priorities. In addition, of the staff members interviewed who discussed programme planning processes in OHCHR, most were of the opinion that such processes had improved, because all field offices now planned against a global set of expected accomplishments and results. They also assessed the performance monitoring system as a generally good planning and programming tool.

49. In that context, the backstopping between OHCHR headquarters and field presences generally works well but is in need of strengthening in some key areas. Of

[21] See OHCHR, "Fundraising at OHCHR: guidance for field presences and headquarters" (2014).

the 17 field presences reviewed, 14 reported that the ability to obtain from headquarters the assistance needed to be able to perform their jobs was adequate or somewhat adequate. Furthermore, 61 per cent of OHCHR staff surveyed strongly or somewhat agreed that headquarters backstopping satisfactorily supported field presences, and 63 per cent agreed that field presences were promptly made aware of field-related policy decisions. Nevertheless, fewer agreed that field staff were sufficiently consulted on OHCHR-wide decisions (54 per cent). Overall, the field staff surveyed rated backstopping support higher than the headquarters staff. Just over half of OHCHR staff interviewed (55 per cent) said that headquarters backstopping of field offices was adequate, although some also noted that desk officers interpreted their roles differently and that advisory and administrative support were not consistent. In particular, stronger political backing was needed at critical junctures and in day-to-day transactions, such as the transfer of funds or recruitment of staff.

50. With regard to structures to promote the sharing of information and experience within OHCHR, just over half of OHCHR staff surveyed (53 per cent) strongly or somewhat agreed that such sharing was sufficient between headquarters and the field, but fewer (39 per cent) agreed that it was sufficient across field presences. Several field staff interviewed made the same point. Some specific examples of important efforts that were not shared satisfactorily with other field locations include the work on indicators in the country office in Mexico and, more generally, the experience gained and lessons learned when, for example, opening offices or in specific contexts, such as post-conflict situations or working under challenging resident coordinators. In the meetings of heads of field presences reviewed, a consistent priority was identified for heads of field presences to create stronger networks, communities of practice and mechanisms for more systematic knowledge management. Furthermore, aside from the yearly meetings, there are no other mechanisms to enable the regular and systematic sharing of experiences between field presences, particularly at the lower staff levels.

51. Notwithstanding the signs of greater structural and programmatic coherence between its headquarters and field presences, OHCHR still lacks an overall plan and strategy for the deployment of its field operations. Although the recent proposal to redeploy staff from headquarters to regional offices can be seen as part of a larger effort to improve its field presences, a broader strategy for when, where and how to deploy its limited resources to the field is still lacking. A clear methodology and systematic approach for determining when and how to reduce and eliminate field offices is also lacking. The recommendation to develop an overarching OHCHR field strategy was made in the previous OIOS evaluation in 2009 (A/64/203 and Corr.1), and the gaps raised in that report with regard to insufficient priority-setting, inconsistent decision-making and limited standardization of work methods remain. Those gaps were also noted in the Joint Inspection Unit report of 2014, in which it was stated that country offices were being established in an ad hoc manner with little if any medium- or long-term vision (see A/70/98). Lastly, a number of OHCHR staff interviewed, including senior-level staff, said that a strategic discussion on where to establish and when to close field presences was lacking.

52. Although both staff and stakeholders interviewed and surveyed, including Member States, commonly agreed that an expanded field presence was necessary for OHCHR to achieve better results, they had mixed views with regard to what that

structure should resemble. A number of staff said that regional presences should be strengthened, whereas others advocated greater strengthening of country offices. In the staff survey, respondents also most frequently said that country offices were the optimal type of OHCHR field presence, but recognized that this option was often not feasible owing to resource constraints and/or the lack of political will.

V. Conclusion

53. As one of the three pillars of the United Nations since the Organization was founded, human rights are at the core of its identity and of the ideals it champions. Covering the broad spectrum of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, human rights are essential in ensuring, in the words of the Charter of the United Nations, "the dignity and worth of the human person". Greater coherence among the three pillars is needed to guide the strategy and activities of the United Nations at the country level.

54. When the post was first established in 1993, the High Commissioner for Human Rights was seen as the head of the then Centre for Human Rights, or, more broadly, of the United Nations human rights programme, and an advocate for the principles of international human rights law. As his or her immediate office, OHCHR must provide the necessary support to enable the High Commissioner to implement that mandate. As the only United Nations entity dedicated exclusively to human rights, and with a broad scope that encompasses the full range of those rights, OHCHR is uniquely placed to contribute to progress in securing and safeguarding human rights for the global population.

55. With its dual and complementary roles of facilitating the establishment of global human rights norms and standards and assisting with their implementation on the ground, OHCHR must support Member States in honouring their universal commitments as determined by the Human Rights Council and country-level recommendations from the universal periodic review. It must also play a leading role in mainstreaming human rights into the wider work of the United Nations system, in particular its peace and security and development pillars. Its presence in the field is critical if it is to succeed in those tasks, and the Office has clearly demonstrated tangible outcomes at the country and regional levels and with its United Nations partners.

56. Nevertheless, OHCHR field presences have been severely limited. There are not enough of them, and there are gaps in what they do and how much they cover. The lack of an overall strategic vision for where to deploy the limited field resources of OHCHR has also hampered its capacity to perform on the ground. Although its headquarters activities are critical and form the normative foundation for its work, OHCHR cannot fully implement its mandate without an equally robust programme of work, engaging directly with Governments, regional organizations, United Nations partners, national human rights institutions and civil society on the ground. It must build upon the considerable success already achieved and continue to seek new and innovative ways to champion the human rights agenda.

VI. Recommendations

57. OIOS makes the following four important recommendations to the Office:

Recommendation 1 (result B, paras. 42 and 43)

58. OHCHR should reassess, reconsider and develop options for future arrangements for human rights advisers, including funding sources and contractual provisions.

Indicator of achievement: an option paper outlining the various scenarios for ensuring the sustainability of human rights advisers as a viable field presence, developed in consultation with the United Nations Development Group.

Recommendation 2 (result B, para. 51)

59. The Office should develop an overarching deployment strategy for OHCHR field presences, which should include:

(a) A clear proposal and corresponding criteria for where, when and how to deploy resources to the field;

(b) Benchmarks for the possible downsizing and/or closing of existing field presences;

(c) A plan for how to ensure that regional offices provide adequate support to the countries that they cover.

Indicator of achievement: a deployment strategy addressing the issues above.

Recommendation 3 (result B, para. 50)

60. The Office should strengthen internal knowledge management by developing tools and protocols to better facilitate the sharing of practice and experience among field presences, and between field presences and headquarters, in order to enhance organizational communication and learning.

Indicator of achievement: An assessment of knowledge gaps and needs and a corresponding plan for developing specific tools and protocols to address them.

Recommendation 4 (result C, paras. 32 and 33)

61. Building upon the good practices identified in paragraph 33, OHCHR should strengthen existing procedures for providing support to Member States in following up on the implementation of recommendations arising from the three types of human rights mechanisms, in particular special procedures.

Indicator of achievement: a review of the existing follow-up instruments and the identification of opportunities for strengthening them, in particular for special procedures.

(*Signed*) Heidi **Mendoza**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
17 March 2017

Annex

Formal comments provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) presents below the full text of comments received from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on its evaluation. This practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

Comments of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the programme evaluation of the Office

1. In response to your memorandum of 24 February 2017, I am pleased to provide herewith the response of OHCHR to the draft report of OIOS on its evaluation.

2. First and foremost, we would like to express our appreciation to you and your staff for the spirit of consultation and open and constructive dialogue throughout the process.

3. The report is welcomed and provides valuable insights for the continued strengthening of the work of OHCHR field operations. The Office agrees with all the recommendations and is committed to their implementation, as set out in the recommendations action plan. In addition, we wish to highlight a number of general considerations as outlined below.

4. The draft report points to the limited funding situation and its impact on the capacity of OHCHR field presences. The draft report also raises a number of challenges faced by OHCHR representatives in the field, including their inadequate grade level as compared to other parts of the United Nations system, which limits their access in the context of a number of policymaking and decision-making processes. In this context, we regret that there is no recommendation responding to the capacity constraints of OHCHR field presences owing to limited funding and the low level of representation. These are important elements that have consequences for the Office's efficiency and effectiveness in various field settings.

5. The draft highlights that "gaps still exist in the geographic coverage". This is inherently linked to the very limited size of OHCHR regional offices, which makes it difficult for them to engage evenly with all countries under their responsibility. The recommendation to develop a plan to ensure that regional offices provide adequate support to the countries they cover is therefore welcomed and important. In this context, we wish to highlight the ongoing efforts of OHCHR to strengthen its regional offices, including as set out in the report of the Secretary-General on the proposed regional restructuring of the Office (A/71/218 and Corr.1).

6. The report does not include an analysis of the human rights components of peacekeeping missions. Although we understand that the human rights components

will be the subject of a separate evaluation, it is important to note that they are an integral part of the Office's engagement in the field. The analysis in the present report, in particular with regard to the discussion on the gaps in coverage, should therefore be read in the light of the fact that the human rights components have not been part of the present evaluation.

7. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your colleagues, in particular the evaluation focal points, for the excellent cooperation.